

## Abstract

**Faculty:** Social Science

**Degree programme:** European and Nordic Studies

**Study track:** Social Science

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**Title:** Fifty shades of postcolonialism: exploring the normative background of the EU's enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans

**Level:** Master's thesis

**Month and year:** October 2021

**Number of pages:** 93 (101 with references)

**Keywords:** EU, enlargement, Western Balkans, Balkans, postcolonialism, post-structuralism, discourse analysis, post-structuralist discourse theory

**Supervisor or supervisors:** Lotta Lounasmeri

### **Abstract:**

Enlargement is the most important foreign policy tool of the European Union. Beyond changing the geographical borders of the Union, enlargement also concerns EU's self-other relations, bringing to the fore the definitions of "European" space, values and norms. Recent, critical approaches to European and EU studies have called scholars to pay attention to the colonial roots of the EU, arguing that EU as an agent in the global arena and its neighbourhood cannot be understood outside or separate from colonial discourses. Drawing from this perspective as well as from the rich literature on the Europe's historical relation to East and the current accession states in the Balkans, this thesis asks (how) is the EU's enlargement policy postcolonial.

To explore, understand and critically assess the normative assumptions that are embedded in enlargement policies, this thesis uses post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT) and the logics approach by Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007) that offers a more specific application of the PDT in empirical analysis. The analysis approaches four most recent EU enlargement policy papers from three angles: what is taken as granted (social logic), what is challenged or institutionalized (political logic) and how the policies are argued for (fantasmatic logic).

The analysis in this thesis brings the postcolonial theoretical concepts into the context of enlargement policies and demonstrates the diversity of the forms in which colonialist assumptions in enlargement policy can play out in practice. Enlargement and the EU's relation to the Balkans emerges from the material as paradoxical and contradictory, producing ambivalence on the Western Balkan's standing in relation to Europe through a discursive double move of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion.

# Fifty Shades of Postcolonialism: Exploring the Normative Background of the EU's Enlargement Policy Towards the Western Balkans

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Master's Programme in European and Nordic Studies

October 2021

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## 1. Introduction

*Enlargement is -- best viewed not so much as a series of discrete events but rather as an ongoing policy issue and policy process. It is an issue and process that is, moreover, quite unlike any other. This is so because enlargement raises fundamental questions about the very nature and direction of European integration.*

(Nugent, 2017, p. 213)

Enlargement is the most successful and important foreign policy tool of the European Union (EU) (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002). The EU—and its predecessor, the European Community (EC)—has been expanding geographically throughout its history. Ever since the first member application by the United Kingdom in 1961, there has not been a time that the EC/EU has not discussed questions of further enlargement (Nugent, 2017). The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Central-Eastern European (CEE) communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s opened a possibility to eastward enlargement and the “re-unification” of Europe, a project that had been the goal of the proponents of European integration since the end of the Second World War (Nugent, 2004; Raunio & Tiilikainen, 2002). Consequently, the past thirty years have marked enlargement in a previously unseen scale, from 12 to 27 members. The so-called “Big Bang” or “Eastern” enlargement of 2004 and 2007 was particularly momentous, bringing in twelve new members<sup>1</sup> and changing radically the political, economic, and geographical composition of the Union.

At the time, Eastern enlargement was celebrated as another success of the “European project” in overcoming and healing the past Cold War divisions (European Union, 2020; Hülse, 2006). Indeed, enlargement is often framed as EU’s historical duty to protect and promote European peace, values and way of life. The violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the failure to prevent bloodshed in the Balkans provided the EU with another such duty, tying the countries in the region to the sequel of European peace project. The Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen

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<sup>1</sup> 2004: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia; 2007: Bulgaria and Romania

communicated this sense of obligation well in one of his speeches during Denmark's presidency of the Council of the European Union:

Just as we thought that nationalism, aggression and war had become unthinkable in Europe, we became witnesses to the brutal conflicts in the Balkans. This demonstrated that lasting peace in Europe would only come about through the unification of Europe. Now we must deliver on the promises. We have a historic and moral obligation to seize the present opportunity to consolidate peace and create the basis for progress across the entire continent. (Rasmussen, 2002)

If European integration is the grand narrative of the EU, when is this historical responsibility fulfilled, or when is European integration finished? The future of the EU enlargement is an important part of the future of the EU; the enlargement policies of today defines possibilities of tomorrow. Thus, imagining the future of the EU is crucial to enlargement politics and policies. These imaginaries, projected to enlargement, are both constituted and constitutive (Mische, 2009). This means that they reflect our present understandings of what is or what should be Europe/EU, but also create the shape the future realities.

Enlargement politics has never been only about the geographical borders of the Union. It has rather been an arena where the very definitions of what is European (and what is not) are negotiated. This is why enlargement politics and policies should always be understood in the wider context of EU's self-understanding and self-other relations. Discussion on enlargement policies should always ask what are the imaginaries that these discussions are based on and how are the definitions of Europe and European are justified. This thesis dives into these grounds by asking what are the normative assumptions that EU's enlargement policies are built on. The focus here is on the ongoing accession process of the so-called Western Balkan six (WB6)<sup>2</sup>: Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo. I will first provide a background for the current situation in enlargement politics and then move on to introduce the research problem and aim of the thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> "Western Balkan six" is a term coined in 2014 when the leaders of the countries met in Berlin to launch the "Western Balkans six initiative" or the "Berlin process" that aims to support the accession process of the countries. The term has ever since been used especially by the EU institutions to refer to the six accession countries

## 1.1 Recent developments in enlargement politics

After the Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007, the emphasis of EU's enlargement agenda has been to advance the negotiations with the "last corner" of Europe, Western Balkans. Countries of the region were promised the "unequivocal support to the European perspective" in Thessaloniki summit of 2003 (European Commission, 2003), but the accession process has ever since been slow, hindered by both internal crisis of the Union and the candidate countries' struggle to meet the accession criteria. Although the accession of Croatia in 2013 as well as the Prespa agreement (2018) that ended the historical name dispute between North Macedonia and Greece have given some glimmer of hope for further progress, 2010s in enlargement politics was shadowed by enlargement "fatigue" and lack of political will to push enlargement forward. Successive postponements and overall lagging of the accession process have also demoralized the WB6 countries in their efforts to make the required reforms. It seems that much of the enthusiasm and optimism of the early 2000s has vanished - some have even described the situation as the "crisis" of the enlargement (Sekulić, 2020).

Dissent and confusion around enlargement are well manifested in recent attempts by the EU to open negotiations with candidate countries Albania and North Macedonia. The two countries were supposed to receive the formal candidate status already in October 2019, but the decision was vetoed by France in late 2019, backed up by the Netherlands and Denmark. The French president Emmanuel Macron referred to disputes between "visions" and called for reforms in enlargement rules (BBC, 2019). Macron's move received controversial responses and frustration from the WB6 countries. Many representatives of the EU establishment also criticized it heavily, including Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker who called it "a major historic mistake", EU Council President Donald Tusk who "felt embarrassed" by this "mistake" and German Chancellor Angela Merkel who was "disappointed" of France's decision (ibid.).

Altogether, the discussions that triggered the French veto and its aftermath highlighted a lack common objective amongst the Member States and EU institutions regarding enlargement policy. While different interests and issues that affect enlargement policy are deeply entangled, there are some main tensions that linger behind current debates. First, as argued by France in its justifications for the veto, there is a fear of accepting "unprepared" new members that could

hamper decision-making and challenge core European values, such as democracy and the rule of law. This is highlighted by recent experiences with countries such as Hungary and Poland that have revealed the EU's inability to intervene in intra-state affairs after accession (Kelemen, 2020). Thus, the French veto can be seen as signaling the anxiety of losing control or discipline over candidate countries that could potentially ally with those EU members that challenge certain (western) understandings of European values and norms. Moreover, there is a fear that a growing number of member states will make the decision-making ever more complicated, hindered by national interests and bilateral disputes. This is particularly worrying for countries such as France that push for the deepening of the integration, especially after Brexit (Eisl, 2019) .

On the other hand, alternative voices, most importantly the new, “geopolitical” European Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen seem to push for a firmer grip on the WB6 countries. Over the past years, Brussels has gradually become aware of the geostrategic importance of the region and the increasing influence of rival powers such as Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf states in the region (Petrovic & Tzifakis, 2021). Although the concrete influence these actors have achieved remains small compared to that of the EU, the realization of increasing competition and the fear of losing dominance has shifted the tone of enlargement debates. (Koppa, 2020; Markovic Khaze & Wang, 2020; Panagiotou, 2020). This is particularly true for the Commission that looks enlargement politics from the perspective of Union's global role and agency. The feeling of urgency can be sensed from the State of the Union address by former President Juncker at the European Parliament:

Europe can export stability, as we have done with the successive enlargements of our Union. For me, these are and will remain success stories – for we were able to reconcile Europe's history and geography. But there is more to be done. We must find unity when it comes to the Western Balkans – once and for all. Should we not, our immediate neighbourhood will be shaped by others. (European Commission, 2018b)

Thus, it seems that while enlargement has sustained its importance as a foreign policy of the Union, the arguments behind enlargement agenda are diverse and constantly on the move due to both internal debates of the EU and the changing geopolitical situation. It could be argued that the

definitive question of the borders of Europe has shifted from *who is European (enough)* towards *who benefits Europe*.

As a response to the French veto, the European Commission introduced a new enlargement methodology called “Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans” in February 2020 (European Commission, 2020a). The principles of the new methodology follow a proposal, or a “non-paper” drafted by France in November 2019<sup>3</sup>. In public, commentators have interpreted the new methodology as an attempt to re-assure both the candidate countries by providing a more concrete and predictable framework, and the (western) Member States by adding the possibility to sanction candidates for “any serious or prolonged stagnation or backsliding” in the process (BBC, 2019). However, despite every effort, the accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania remain to be started due to bilateral disputes between Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

## 1.2 Research problem and the aim of the thesis

Continuous challenges in decision-making and the lack of progress in accession talks begs the question of whether there is a shared vision of enlargement. To understand where the EU is heading, we need better insight on how the EU institutions see themselves, their role and the future of Europe. More specifically, to evaluate and assess these perceptions, we need to ask what are the underlying normative assumptions that EU policies are built on. After all, policies do not appear from thin air but are always rooted in particular interpretations of the current situation in which certain aspects are seen as problematic and some others as desirable (Bacchi, 2009).

Recent studies on European integration and European identity have raised questions about the colonialist and imperialist aspects of the European project, calling researchers to pay more attention to the colonialist roots of the EU and European integration (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014; Jansen, 2010; Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013; Pasture, 2018). From this postcolonial<sup>4</sup> perspective, the EU

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<sup>3</sup> France’s non-paper “Reforming the European Union accession process” available at : <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Enlargement-nonpaper.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The terminology of post-, neo-,(post) or postcolonial has been widely debated amongst postcolonial theorists, as some interpret the prefix “post-“ is misleading in assuming that periods of “colonialism” and “post-colonialism” can be neatly separated. (Ashcroft et al., 2013, pp. 204–209). In this thesis, I use the term “postcolonial” in referring to the



as a regional and global actor should be critically assessed through the legacy of Western colonialism and its continuous impact in today's societies and international relations. Building on current postcolonial theory and research on the EU, the starting point of this thesis is the understanding of the EU as a power operating in postcolonial space. The aim of this thesis is to answer the following research question: *(how) is the enlargement policy of the European Union postcolonial?*

In this thesis, I approach EU enlargement policy as a site of political competition and compromise where different understandings of Europe, Europeaness and the future of the integration are negotiated. My aim is to conduct a critical analysis of the enlargement policy discourse to shed light to the very assumptions these policies are built on. I will focus solely on the 'official' or institutional enlargement discourses by the EU, articulated in enlargement policy documents that set the agenda and guide decision-making in enlargement politics. The research task can be understood as two-fold. First, the aim is to de-construct enlargement policy discourse in order to describe the underlying assumptions of enlargement politics, and secondly, to critically assess these assumptions through postcolonial theory and concepts.

The first part of the research task, de-construction, is conducted through post-structuralist discourse analysis. The theoretical premises and methodological choices of this thesis are based on Political Discourse Theory (PDT), a post-structuralist approach developed notably by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). More specifically, the ontological and epistemological premises, as well as the empirical analysis, follow the Logics of Critical Explanation, by Jason Glynos and David Howarth (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, 2008). While putting in motion its own way of explanation in social science, the logics approach builds on Laclau's and Mouffe's theoretical foundation, sharing their basic ontology, premises, and motivations. In short, this means that social structures - such as the enlargement policy- are seen as *discursive* and radically *contingent*. Discourse is understood as productive, and constitutive for social relations and reality. The meaning of (policy) articulation, then, is extended from mere descriptions or reactions of the social reality to constitutive acts of power. The contingency of

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impact of colonialism and colonial structures and mentalities in today's Europe and the research that looks into them. In addition, I will be using "neocolonial" in referring to contemporary or novel forms and structures of colonialism.

discourse means that meanings are never fixed but remain open; they can be always contested and re-defined. Thus, enlargement politics can be seen as a site of articulatory struggle between different stakeholders over constituting the meanings of enlargement. The research task is to de-construct or unpack these meanings. For the purposes of this thesis, the strength of the logics approach is that it does not only allow for (critically) describing the existing discourse, but also asks how discourses are sedimented or challenged and argued for. This way, it is possible to assess the normative background of the enlargement discourse by analysing what is problematised, what has been left untouched and how these decisions are argued for (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth et al., 2016).

Recent research has shown that enlargement policy, a meeting point of foreign policy and self-determination, offers a uniquely interesting viewpoint to Europeanness and its Others, linking enlargement policy to the wider question of European identity vis-à-vis the “rest” and in this case particularly the “East” (Case, 2009; Hülse, 2006; Kølvrå, 2016, 2018). By critically exploring the normative background of enlargement politics, this thesis aims to contribute to the postcolonial theory’s agenda proposed by Nora Onar and Kalypso Nicolaïdis (2013). This means de-centring Europe in research through challenging Eurocentrism (provincializing), engaging alternative perspectives, and recognizing historical patterns underpinning EU enlargement policy (ibid.). Paying special attention to the long history of constructing European “Self” against the Balkan “Other” and discussing its implications to the enlargement project, this thesis also contributes to the tradition of the critique of Balkanism and Balkanising mentalities (Petrović, 2014; Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004; Todorova, 1997). In practice, this means that the de-constructed enlargement discourse is critically assessed through the concepts of postcolonial theories.

While two parts of the research task (de-construction and postcolonial critique) are here separately introduced for analytical purposes, they are overlapping in practice. Loyal to the spirit of post-structuralist discourse analysis and an interpretative approach to social science, the whole research process is understood as an open and abductive practice, where the investigation begins from certain theoretical concepts that can be adjusted through empirical observations. This way, the researcher moves back and forth between theoretical and methodological realms.

For fresh insight, my analysis will focus on comparing the most recent enlargement policy papers by the European Commission (EC): 2018 enlargement strategy (European Commission, 2018a) the new, “revised” enlargement methodology (European Commission, 2020a) and two of the most recent<sup>5</sup> yearly “enlargement packages” (European Commission, 2019, 2020b) that explain Commission’s enlargement policy and take stock of the progress in each candidate country. A moment of publicly proclaimed change, such as the revision of the EU accession process in 2019-2020, can be particularly revealing of the normative framework because it enables to observe not only what has been changed but also what has been left unquestioned, that is, what is taken for granted in enlargement politics. According to logics approach, studying such a moment of *public contestation* reveals if the contestation only concerns the surface or substantial issues of the given discourse or whether the very foundations of the discourse are questioned (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

While EU’s enlargement policy and the of EU as an actor in global politics have been extensively studied from a variety of perspectives, my experience is that too little attention has been given to the (normative) assumptions that enlargement policies are built on. The enlargement discourse is consistently on the move and its understanding requires constant attention. Currently only few analyses on the new enlargement methodology have been published, focusing mainly on geopolitics and the political bargaining around the French veto (Petrovic & Tzifakis, 2021). This thesis aims to answer to this deficit by providing a timely analysis of the most recent articulations of enlargement discourse.

Furthermore, although the collective past(s) and their role in forming European identities have been given a lot of attention, the projections of European futures, especially in the context of enlargement politics, remain to be largely unexplored. As noted by Ann Miche (2009), “to examine future projections is not to assume that they come true, but to explore the ways they deeply infuse social interaction, albeit in possibly contradictory and surprising ways” (p. 702). The application of logics approach is important in this regard, for it does not only describe the present of enlargement discourses but also considers what kind of future(s) they imagine. Thus, following Rainer Hülse (2006), enlargement discourse is here understood as producing “both political

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<sup>5</sup> The enlargement package of 2021 was published on the verge of handing in this thesis, on 19 October.

decisions about enlargement and a certain understanding of the EU” dealing “with the future shape of the EU, its boundaries, criteria for membership and its relationship to its former and future others” (p. 405).

The innovation in this thesis is to combine post-structuralist discourse analysis and postcolonialist critique in the study of EU enlargement policies. These traditions fit together well, as postcolonial theory highlights the importance of understanding the ways in which colonialism is socially produced and how colonialist discourses interact with material realities.

This thesis begins with a chapter on EU enlargement politics as topic of research, introducing recent literature on European integration and EU enlargement and discussing how this thesis is positioned in relation to existing literature. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical foundations of this thesis. It is divided in two parts: postcolonial theory and post-structuralist discourse analysis. This is followed by discussion on the methodology and introduction of the empirical data in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the main findings of the analysis. Implications and possible limitations of these findings and are discussed in chapter 6, while chapter 7 draws together conclusions.

## 2. EU enlargement

### 2.1 Enlargement as an EU policy domain

According to the definition found on the webpage of the European Council, EU enlargement is “the process whereby countries join the European Union” once they have fulfilled the membership criteria (European Council, 2021). Although this type of technical and formal definition of enlargement is typical style of the EU, scholars tend to look enlargement from a wider perspective. For the purposes of this thesis, I adopt Juncos’ and Perez’s dualistic understanding of enlargement as both a process and a policy (Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2013). Enlargement as a *process* refers to the “gradual and formal horizontal institutionalization of organizational rules and norms” (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002, p. 503). This take mainly focuses on how the candidate countries adopt to the membership criteria. Enlargement as a *policy*, in turn, involves the “principles, goals, and instruments defined by the EU with the aim of incorporating new member states” (Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2013). Thus, it draws attention to the EU and its different institutions as policymakers. Although both sides are significant and cannot be fully separated in practice, this thesis focuses on the latter in order to understand EU enlargement as a EU policy domain. This definition also allows to go beyond individual enlargement” events” and to approach enlargement as a continuum of practices, assumptions and norms (Nugent, 2017).

The EC/EU has gone through four rounds of enlargement: Northern<sup>6</sup>, Mediterranean<sup>7</sup>, EFTA<sup>8</sup>, and Eastern enlargements<sup>9</sup>. In addition, Croatia joined the EU in 2013. While each of these have changed the Union and tested its integrational abilities and flexibility in their own way, the Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007 is widely seen as the most significant and challenging for the Union (as well as for the candidates), bringing in most extensive changes to the composition of the Union, as well as changing the way the whole enlargement process is understood. (Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2013) Although the difficulties of the Eastern enlargement are often

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<sup>6</sup> 1973: Denmark, Ireland, UK

<sup>7</sup> 1981: Greece; 1986: Portugal and Spain

<sup>8</sup> 1995: Austria, Finland and Sweden (EFTA refers to countries’ membership of the European Free Trade Area)

<sup>9</sup> 2004: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia; 2007: Bulgaria and Romania

highlighted, many of the main challenges and characteristics of enlargement were there already during the earlier rounds. These are for example the asymmetrical power relationship between the EU and the candidate countries that has been evident from the beginning, and the fact that new members have always increased the variety of national interests that have to be reconciled. Thus, the EU has always had to react and accommodate new members with institutional changes such as the institutionalization of European Council or the Single European Act of qualified majority voting (ibid.). The growing number of member states has also affected to such things as the size of the Commission and the distribution of the seats in the European Parliament (EP). This way, enlargement has always been an interactive process, transforming both the candidate countries as well as the Union itself.

After what (at the time) seemed like a successful transformation of the Central- Eastern European countries into liberal democracies through Eastern enlargement, the EU was confident that a similar formula could be repeated in the Western Balkans. The failure to intervene during the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia also provided a moral obligation for the EU to engage in the region in the early 2000s (Noutcheva, 2012). After the Western Balkan countries were given an “enlargement perspective” in Thessaloniki in 2003, their accession has put EU’s transformative power into continuous test. The conditions which the countries must fulfil do not only concern economic or democratic governance but the consolidation of statehood in the post-conflict region. This means both internally setting up a sovereign and legitimate governance and externally solving bilateral conflicts (ibid.).

## 2.2 Processes and actors

According to the Article 49 of the treaty on European Union (TEU), any European state that respects and promotes the values of the EU can apply for membership (European Union, 2012). These values are: “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, -- pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men” (ibid.). In practice, however, becoming a member is a much more complicated process that evolves around the principle of conditionality. Political and economic conditionality for the membership were introduced in enlargement politics for the Eastern enlargement round in 1993. These so-called

Copenhagen criteria<sup>10</sup> requires aspiring member countries to have stable democratic institutions, functioning market economy and the ability to adopt the EU's *acquis communautaire*, the accumulating body of EU legislation (European Council, 1993). Conditionality is implemented in the 35 different chapters of the enlargement negotiations. The Commission monitors each candidate's compliance with the accession criteria through the chapters and following the benchmarks set in different documents. (Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2013, p. 230)<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the Commission together with the member states reserve unilaterally the right to estimate when the candidate countries meet the requirements. Experiences with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria—that were admitted membership albeit not fully meeting the criteria—have led member states to require stricter application of conditionality and more elaborate monitoring by the Commission. (Dimitrova & Kortenska, 2019; Juncos & Pérez-Solórzano Borragán, 2013, p. 232). Novel conditions for the Western Balkan countries were also set in the new enlargement methodology (2020a) which introduced sanction mechanisms for stagnation or backsliding in converging with the accession criteria.

Strict set of clear conditions has been understood on the EU's side as supporting merit-based, individual progress of each candidate country as opposed to enlargement as a “political” decision. However, enlargement does not depend only on candidate countries' performance. According to the Maastricht treaty (European Union, 1992) each member state and the European parliament must agree on any new members, meaning that any member state can use their veto power to block decisions on enlargement. This has sometimes led to member states using the accession process to promote their own interests, as in the case of Bulgaria on the opening of North Macedonia's enlargement negotiations in 2020. The EU's capacity to absorb new members has also become an increasingly politicised issue (Börzel et al., 2017).

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<sup>10</sup> Copenhagen criteria:

1. *political criteria*: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
2. *economic criteria*: a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces
3. *administrative and institutional capacity* to effectively implement the *acquis* and ability to take on the obligations of membership. (European Council, 1993)

<sup>11</sup> For the Western Balkans, these are the stabilization and association agreements (SAAs), the European partnership agreements (EPAs), the Europe agreements and the Commission's annual reports (enlargement packages)

In practice, the accession process starts with submitting an application to the European Council, which is forwarded to the Commission. After collecting information about the applicant through a questionnaire, the Commission prepares an opinion about the applicant's readiness to meet the accession criteria. The Commission can then recommend the opening of the negotiations to the Council. The Council must reach unanimity on starting the negotiations. The actual negotiations start with the adaptation of a negotiation framework. In the new methodology, chapters are clustered in six thematic groups.<sup>12</sup> The opening and closing of each cluster requires the unanimous agreement of member states. When all chapters are closed, the European Parliament and each of the member states still need to approve the accession treaty.

Although the enlargement as a process has changed over the time, the main actors of enlargement politics have remained the same: the member states, the Commission and the European Parliament. Enlargement can be seen as an intergovernmental policy in which the member states have the last word, the Commission monitors candidate countries' performance against accession conditions and the Parliament must consent any new accession. Referring to enlargement process as "negotiations" is in a sense misleading, since the candidate countries themselves have no influence over the substance of the accession criteria and process. They have been only able to decide on the timing and speed of compliance and with the new sanction mechanism, not even that. The role of the Commission is significant and often overlooked. Although it formally acts as a "technical assistant" of the Council in monitoring conditionality, in fact it plays a crucial role in preparing the applicants prior to negotiations, supporting them in fulfilling the accession criteria, providing yearly enlargement packages on the progress of candidate countries and developing enlargement policy. Some scholars argue that the Commission has expanded its role in enlargement politics through its direct engagement with the candidate countries throughout the accession process and that its influence will only increase with the ever-more complicated process (Rudik, 2017). Özlem Terzi (2021), for example, has demonstrated how the Commission uses its power of agenda setting in impacting the emotional setting and norms of enlargement politics by "enabling or delimiting the options of the European Council". This is one more reason why it is important to study closely the premises of the enlargement policies by the Commission.

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<sup>12</sup> Fundamentals, Internal Market, Competitiveness and inclusive growth, Green agenda and sustainable connectivity, Resources, agriculture and cohesion, External relations (EC 2020a)



## 2.3 Research on EU enlargement

Enlargement of the European Union has been widely researched from different perspectives. The focus of research has shifted historically, reflecting practical questions and challenges in enlargement politics as well as more general trends in academia, and EU studies in particular (Gateva, 2019). There has also been a political need for integration research which has had its impact on what has been studied and how. The special position of enlargement in the intersection between different policy sectors has made it an interesting research topic for scholars in such fields as European security (Higashino, 2004; Shepherd, 2017), public opinion (Taydas & Kentmen-Cin, 2017), political economy (Csaba, 2001; Likic-Brboric, 2011), migration (Favell & Hansen, 2002; Koff, 2005; Kraus & Schwager, 2004), national interests of the member states (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003), and geopolitics (Petrovic & Tsifakis 2021). The impact of enlargement to EU's internal affairs and "integrational capacity" has also been given attention (Börzel et al., 2017; Toshkov, 2017). A great deal of enlargement literature also discusses integration theories as explanations of enlargement, asking why do states want to join the EU and why does the EU want to enlarge (Sjursen, 2002). While this thesis has been influenced by myriad of different scholarly works, three branches of enlargement literature are particularly important here: research on European integration, European identity and the EU as a normative foreign policy actor. Each of these strands will be elaborated separately later in this chapter.

While recent literature on EU enlargement is highly relevant in putting this thesis into context, it is important to remember that it dominantly deals with Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007 and its consequences. It is often that direct parallels are drawn between experiences of previous Eastern enlargement and the prospects of the accession of the Western Balkan countries. The post-accession developments of the East-Central European countries are reflected both in the academic literature as well as in the current political rhetoric of enlargement. While this is quite understandable (considering enlargement policy as a continuing process), treating Western Balkan countries as simply followers of the East-Central European countries can be also problematic, for it risks projecting the experiences of Eastern enlargement into the current developments and directing the attention solely into preventing the re-emergence of similar problems. It also works in renewing the image of all "Eastern" countries as a homogenic, essentialized group with generizable challenges.

Although enlargement politics as a phenomenon has been widely researched, the enlargement policy documents have not played a central role, even less from a critical perspective. There are some exceptions in this regard that work as important reference points for this thesis. Published already twenty years ago, *Empire's New Clothes: Unveiling Eu Enlargement* examines enlargement policy through the concepts of coloniality and empire (Böröcz & Kovács, 2001). The contributions of Melinda Kovács and Peter Kabachnik in this volume are of particular importance. They conduct discourse analysis on the Commission Opinions on the ten then-candidate countries in 1997 and Kovacs on the follow-up reports of 1998 and 1999, demonstrating how imperial and colonialist mentalities are present in EU policy documents (Kovács, 2001; Kovács & Kabachnik, 2001). This volume has been a major source of inspiration for this thesis, but it is high time to update this analysis. A more recent contribution is Tatjana Sekulić's *The European Union and the Paradox of Enlargement: The Complex Accession of the Western Balkans*, a book that discusses the contradictions underlying the EU enlargement process. (Sekulić, 2020). Combining ethnographic research within the stakeholder institutions with discourse analysis on EC documents between 2008 and 2019, Sekulić's work offers a comprehensive understanding of the agencies and processes involved in enlargement negotiations. Based on her research, Sekulić criticises the weak position and lack of inclusion of applicant states in the enlargement process, showing that the one-directional conditionality is not very effective without a context-specific understanding of the candidate countries. This conclusion played an important role in framing the research setting for this thesis. Özlem Terzi (2020), in turn, approaches enlargement policy papers from the point of view he calls the "emotional norms of enlargement". According to him, the enlargement process only makes progress when the official institutional discourse matches with the wider emotional understanding of who belongs to the EU or who does not. This argument supports the aim of this thesis to investigate the assumptions that shape enlargement politics, for it is only through transparency and reflection that we can assess such emotional norms. As a good and timely overview and further proof for enlargement policy paper's relevance as empirical material, Petrovic and Tzifakis (2021) critically reflect the "geopolitical turn" initiated by the Commission by going through the enlargement policy papers from recent years in their introduction to a special issue<sup>13</sup> on the contemporary challenges of EU enlargement policy.

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<sup>13</sup> Journal of Contemporary European Studies, Volume 29, Issue 2 (2021): *EU enlargement to the Western Balkans: The geopolitical turn or another postponement?*

### 2.3.1 European integration studies

Enlargement can be seen as a sub-category of European integration studies, representing the horizontal or widening (as opposed to vertical or deepening) aspect of integration. While the horizontal aspect of enlargement was long neglected in the integration literature, there has been an escalation of enlargement literature in the past decades, sparked in particular by the Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007. (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002) One of the most influential trends has been a so-called Europeanisation approach that has mainly focused on EU's transformative power, that is, how well the new member and candidate states adapt or converge to EU norms and rules<sup>14</sup>. Europeanization literature has made an important contribution in studying the proliferation of EU norms and normative power, not only in candidate countries but also in the wider neighborhood. Similarly, research on EU conditionality has looked into the effectiveness and implications of the EU's conditional policies in its external relations<sup>15</sup>. However, since the focus of this thesis is the enlargement discourse produced by the EU, not the performance of the candidate countries or the implications of conditionality, neither Europeanisation nor conditionality literature do not provide much for uncovering the normative background of enlargement politics in this thesis. Moreover, the starting point of Europeanisation/conditionality literature can even prove to be problematic, for it "directs us to think of the political space in terms of the Europeanization and European norms" (Kuus, 2007). According to Merje Kuus (ibid.), this has meant that the region has on the one hand been "moved discursively closer to Europe (proper) while, on the other hand, it has been inscribed with further degrees of Eastness (p. 155). Nevertheless, acknowledging conditionality as an institutionalized norm in enlargement politics is crucial, for it ultimately lays the framework of accession negotiations and its power dynamics in which the EU is the one setting conditions and the candidates the ones trying to fulfil them.

Integration theories often aim to explain enlargement; why does it happen or why not. The theoretical explanations of enlargement can be roughly divided in two: rationalist and constructivist, depending on their ontological stance (F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier 2002). While the former usually focuses on the perceived benefits of enlargement, the latter aims to

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<sup>14</sup> see Bojinović Fenko & Stahl, 2019; Kovacevic, 2019; Sedelmeier, 2011

<sup>15</sup> see Gateva, 2013, 2015; Hughes & Sasse, 2015; Schimmelfennig, 2008; Steunenberg & Dimitrova, 2007; Vos, 2017

explain enlargement through ideas, identities, and culture. Understanding enlargement politics as socially constructed, this thesis draws from the latter tradition. However, the focus here is not in explaining why enlargement happens but *how* does it happen.

### 2.3.2 Enlargement and European identity

Following the constructive turn in the 1990s, many of the International Relations scholars started to explore the role of collective identities in international relations. The discussion on whether there is such thing as European identity has ever since intensified, not least because of the EU's own needs to bridge growing diversity between the new and the old member states as well as across political camps.<sup>16</sup> This shows also in the enlargement literature, where enlargement politics is seen as a building site of European identity. The Eastern enlargement, in particular, is understood as a turning point in re-organisation of the European self-other relations (Hülse, 2006; Kuus, 2004, 2007; Zielonka, 2013). In defining who gets to become part of the "European family", the EU can be seen to exercise power over defining Europeanness.

In his analysis of EU enlargement discourse in Germany, Rainer Hülse (2006) distinguishes five metaphors<sup>17</sup> that are commonly used in describing enlargement process and discusses how each of those construct European identity. He argues that while the EU, having actually many different definitions of borders, is often described as a *sui generis* post-modern or post-nationalist polity, the metaphors still mainly construct an European identity that is very similar to national ones. Metaphors of EU enlargement as "family reunion", "homecoming" or "growing together" create image of European identity as primordial right or destiny for those who are considered part of the "European family" (Hülse, 2006). This is very much visible in how the Western Balkans' accession is often described as "completion" of European integration or fulfilling the historical responsibility towards the last members of European family. At the same time, the EU is emotionalized, that is, discursively transformed from political organization to "home" or "family". This can also be seen as a de-politizing the enlargement process: by using metaphors that construct enlargement as a

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed analysis on problems relate to European identity as concept, see Wiesner & Schmidt-Gleim (2014): *The Meanings of Europe: Changes and Exchanges of a Contested Concept*

<sup>17</sup> These metaphors are: enlargement as "family reunion", "homecoming", "growing together", "path" and "entering into a house" (Hülse, 2006)

matter of private or even "natural" relations, enlargement politics can be shifted away from the realm of politics and democratic debate (ibid.).

For Hülse, the only empirical exception to exclusive and primordial differentiation is the metaphor of enlargement as a *path*. In this narrative, the candidates are on their way to EU, which is the final destination, a Fukuyaman "end of history", if you wish. The path is filled with "interim benchmarks" and the gradual progress depends on how well the candidate fulfills conditions set by the EU. Thus, the boundary between self and the other or European and non-European is not so clear-cut. Instead, Hülse proposes that the EU creates kind of more ambiguous "in-between spaces" or "inclusive positions", where candidates can become more European, until they are European enough. From the point of view of this thesis, the path metaphor makes a very interesting case. As Hülse argues, articulating enlargement process "reconstitutes the EU's political control over the accession process". Similar to "European perspective"<sup>18</sup>, path metaphor gives a very vague and ambiguous picture of the accession process, but one with a clear direction: towards the EU. In contrast to the understanding of the EU as an exclusive club (or family) with clear, pre-determined borders, the path-metaphor constructs Europe and European identity as a temporal, not a spatial category. As pointed out by Ole Wæver (2000), everyone can become European, just not yet. He argues that by "drawing on the classical uncertainty about the Eastern boundary of Europe' -- 'the EU manages to place nobody as non-European but everybody as more or less European, more or less close to the centre (of Europe and of Europeanness)" (ibid., p.263). In placing Others in relation to European centre, the EU can be seen as exercising disciplinary power.

Undeniably, the European identity project has been successful at least in one sense: the role of the EU in defining "European" is so strong, that in current research, it is hard to imagine what would be the "European" object of identification outside the EU. From this perspective, the EU has dominated the articulation of "European" and the contingency of the equation mark in the European=EU equation is discursively hidden.<sup>19</sup> While the EU might be the only game in town

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<sup>18</sup> European/EU perspective is another wording by the EU, used to communicate EU's commitment to WB6 's future accession. The most recent, revised enlargement strategy is called "Enhancing the accession process- a credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans" (EC 2020)

<sup>19</sup> However, this might be changing f. ex the recent debate on the meaning of rule of law shows that countries such as Hungary and Poland are promoting their alternative understanding of "European"

when it comes to European integration, it does not mean that European identity would be any more “real” or attractive from the point of view of Europeans themselves. The EU-led European identity project has been criticized not only for lacking any real polity (Habermas, 1995) but also for its top-down articulation that “draws on a dry, institutional, symbolic conception of identity” (Stavrakakis, 2005, p. 81). According to Yannis Stavrakakis, this “jouissance deficit” of European identity puts the whole future of European identity in jeopardy: Europeanness as an identity or fantasy can last only if it becomes more enjoyable or attractive. Christoffer Kølvråa has responded to Stavrakakis by claiming in that European identity in fact can be a source of enjoyment (jouissance) that originates from declining nationalism. The legacy of the EU’s birth myth, historical post Second World War decision to say “never again” legitimates Europeans to feel superiority over nationalist desires as well as expect admiring gazes from the outside (Kølvråa, 2016, 2018). For Kølvråa, the European identity is based on two assumptions: that Europe and Europeans are superior to their Others and that everyone wants to become European. From the point of view of enlargement discourse, this prompts a question of whether these attitudes could be seen in EU-produced enlargement discourse.

### 2.3.3 Enlargement as foreign policy

Rather than a sectoral issue, enlargement is often understood in a wider context of the EU’s foreign policy, for it concerns the Union’s relationships with other states and regions. Indeed, enlargement is often referred to as the most important and successful foreign policy tool of the EU. Beyond any bilateral relations, however, enlargement policy is about what kind of actor the EU is and wants to be in its neighborhood and in the global arena. The current Commission led by Ursula Von der Leyen, has called itself the “geopolitical commission” and wishes to re-vitalise the enlargement agenda by framing it as a geopolitical question vis-a-vis “third country influence” in the region (Petrovic & Tzifakis, 2021; Stanicek, 2020). Thus, the enlargement agenda is intertwined with other foreign policy interests.

According to Ian Manners, the EU is a soft, normative power that by promoting its values and defending right-based multilateral cooperation changes the norms of international relations (Manners, 2002). Enlargement could be thus understood as a form of soft power whereby countries are not forced but persuaded to converge with EU’s norms. From the EU’s point of view,

its historically successful expansion works as a historical proof of the superiority and attractiveness of the “European model”. Thus, sustaining the enlargement process as a value-based project is not only a question of integration but also of the credibility and legitimacy of the whole European project.

The balancing between geopolitical interests and sustaining enlargement as a normative process has produced what Nicolas Smith et al. (2020) call the democracy-stability dilemma of EU’s foreign policy. On the one hand, there is a strong interest to stabilise the neighboring regions to the EU through integration. On the other hand, compromising the normative agenda by i.e. cooperating with authoritarian leaders or “stabilitocrats” (Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, 2017) in the Western Balkan region is seen as risking the EU’s credibility as a normative power.

Thus, as the democracy-stability dilemma demonstrates, defining enlargement as a foreign policy issue does not mean that it deals exclusively with external affairs (Sjursen & Smith, 2018). In this thesis, enlargement policy is understood as an example of a policy field where external and internal affairs intersect.

### 3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis combines two academic traditions: post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT) and postcolonial theory. I understand these two approaches here as complimentary, offering different ways to deconstruct, conceptualize and critically assess the phenomena at hand. In short, post-structuralist framework sets the ontological and epistemological basis of this study, while postcolonial theory offers more specific conceptual tools for the normative critique of the EU enlargement discourse. I will start this chapter by introducing postcolonial theory and reflecting how it impacts the way EU enlargement is understood in this thesis. I will then move on to introduce PDT and discuss how it can be operationalized in studying enlargement discourse.

#### 3.1 Postcolonial approaches

Postcolonial theory is a diverse branch of theoretical approaches originally inspired by Edward Said's path-breaking work on *Orientalism* (1995/1978). It has been further developed by thinkers such as Ashis Nandy, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The starting point for postcolonial theories is that although many of the institutions that characterized colonialism in a traditional sense -such as slavery- have been officially dissolved, the patterns of economic, political and cultural control and exploitation prevail and therefore the concepts and the critique of colonialism stay relevant (Manzo, 2014). Indeed, as argued by David Potter, it was only the "international political dimension", that is, the formal aspect of colonialism that ended through decolonisation (Potter, 1992). Thus, the focus is on uncovering and critically assessing the continuation of colonialism in other means. While postcolonial critique started with a focus on the relations between former colonies and colonizers, it has inspired scholars to look for colonialist and imperialist structures in less evident contexts. Given the global impact and scope of the colonial time it is possible to argue that the whole world is in a sense postcolonial, albeit differently in different contexts (Prasad, 2003). Colonialism can also be seen as deterritorialised: according to Nandy, what she calls "the second form of colonization" helps to "generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category" so that "the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds" (Nandy, 1983, p. xi). As argued by Anshuman Prasad, the ways in which colonial mentalities still persist and manifest themselves are heterogenous and yet systematic in how the power



imbalances between “West” and the “rest” shape our world. This is often present as different forms of Eurocentrism, that is, the normalisation of European experience as the normal and the ideal (Kaiwar, 2014).

Given that the founders and the first members of the European Community were also the most influential colonial powers, it is quite astonishing how the EU has managed to create a narrative of European integration without having to deal with its colonial past. In recent years, postcolonial approaches have gained momentum in EU studies, aiming to address what Patrick Pasture (2018) calls EU’s “institutional amnesia”. Scholars such as Pasture go as far as to argue that the initial motivations behind European integration were heavily influenced by (neo)colonialist interests, aiming to save the global influence of ex-colonialist powers after the end of the formal colonial rule. This resonates with Alan Milward’s idea of European integration as “rescuing” the nation state (Milward, 2000).

In this thesis, postcolonial theory is important from two perspectives. First, as described above, the EU is here understood as a postcolonial actor in a postcolonial world. This means that we should pay attention to the ways in which the legacy of colonialism is present in EU’s policies. The second aspect is the EU’s relation to the Balkans and “the East” in more general. For example, Ivar Neumann (1998) and Maria Todorova (1997) have pointed out how the category of “Eastern Europe” as a half-way house between Europe and Asia was invented already in the 18th century. The end of the Cold War and the integration of the Eastern bloc into Western institutions has shifted attention to the (neo)colonial structures between the East and the West, as the “Europeanisation” of former socialist states offered a whole new arena for European “civilising mission”. In what follows, I will first discuss how the critique of Balkanism has sought to conceptualize and historically contextualize the EU/Europe-Balkan relations. I will then move on to other relevant literature that draw on different strands of post-colonialist critique in studying EU’s relation to its eastern “Others”.

### 3.1.1 Critique of Balkanism: Balkan as the Europe’s historical Other

The critique of Balkanism is a strand of literature that applies postcolonial approaches in studying the relationship between ‘Europe’ and ‘the Balkans’. Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) is often seen as the ground-breaking text and the starting point for critically assessing

Eurocentric, essentializing<sup>20</sup> imaginaries and representations of the Balkans. For Todorova, the Balkans is “geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as ‘the Other’” (ibid., p. 455). It is “the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian” (ibid., p. 453), “a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and ‘the west’ has been constructed” (ibid. p, 455). While the geographical or cultural definitions of the ‘Balkan’ have been ambiguous, the idea of Balkans as somehow exceptionally and essentially violent and un-civilized has prevailed throughout centuries in the eyes of (Western) Europe, as any conflict in the region has been taken as another proof of that fixed, problematic nature of the “Balkan”. Similarly, Said (1995/1978) writes about how Orientalism constructs the “Orient” as the opposite of what is understood as Western, producing the “essence” of both as binary and hierarchical in relation to each other. Anshuman Prasad interprets Said, this “conceptual maneuver” provided the legitimization for colonialism, as the education of inferior cultures became almost a moral obligation, or “a project designed to civilize, improve, and help those peoples who were ‘lagging behind’ in the March of History and Civilization” (Prasad, 2004, p. 12).

Todorova’s analysis on the long history of “balkanising” attitudes prompts a question of whether similar imaginaries and the power imbalance are still in play, or even institutionalized in the enlargement process. From the postcolonial perspective, reinforcing the image of Balkans as a problematic region in an urgent need of European guidance can even help to legitimise the strict conditionality and the ‘one-way’ nature of the enlargement process. To become European in the right way, the Balkans need to be first de-Europeanized, to strip them off any leverage in defining what is European. Tanja Petrović, for example, argues that although European accession for the Balkan states should mean moving closer to Europe, it ends up pushing them into the “third world zone” (Petrović, 2014).

While Europe’s relation to Balkans has often been constructed through a process of othering, Todorova has also pointed out how the Balkans represent the dark side *within* Europe, a reminder of the EU’s most horrifying Other: its own, violent history of wars, ethnic cleansing, and instability.

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<sup>20</sup> Essentialism refers to “the idea that any specific group of objects or people (e.g., a race, gender, or class) is marked, identified, and defined by pure, immutable, and transhistorical characteristics and essences that inhere in the specific group in question, and that determine the fundamental and unique nature of that group” (Prasad, 2003, p. 25)

For example, Slavoj Žižek has suggested that “what Europe may be afraid to recognize in the recent Yugoslav war is the violent origin of its own system of nation-states”(Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004). This causes a paradox, as the part that “Europeans” want to distance themselves is not in fact an external but rather an internal, constitutive part of Europe, one that has been denied of its belongingness to Europe.

From the perspective of postcolonial theory and the critique of Balkanism in particular, it could be argued that the basis of the EU-Balkan relations is built on the ‘West’, looking at the Balkans through the lenses of (relative) belatedness while being painfully reminded of its own past crisis and conflicts. The memory of uncontrollable violence is projected and capsulated to the Balkans, although similar conflicts have occurred everywhere in Europe throughout the history. Some scholars further claim that balkanization is further renewed and reinforced by a degree of “self-balkanisation”; a variation of what Alexander Kiossev calls “self-colonization” (Kiossev, 1995, 2008). For Kiossev, the term refers to cultures that have not been colonized in practice but because of “historical circumstances” have been “transformed into an extra-colonial ‘periphery’”, where “they had to recognize self-evidently the foreign cultural dominance and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe” (ibid., 2008). According to Kiossev, the power imbalance between the self-colonizing (the Balkans) and the center (Europe) stems from the fact that “their own cultural identity emerged as a spin-off in the process of Euro-colonial hegemony, in an asymmetrical exchange with the colonial center”(ibid.). This results in constant grieving to be recognized by the center that can be further used as a tool in legitimizing one-way processes of Europeanization, for example. In their empirical research, Maple Razsa and Nicole Lindstrom (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004, p. 634) similarly argue that balkanism “became an effective means of disciplining states like Croatia that aspire to be recognized as European”. Balkanization is also used by the countries themselves to highlight differences between those who have managed to “wave goodbye to Balkan” and those who seem to be unable to “overcome” their Balkanism and the “typical” problems it causes (ibid.). Thus, it could be argued that for the EU, self-balkanization, the by-product of its own discourses, would be useful in getting rid of ‘Balkan’ in the process of Europeanization.

Overall, from the point of view of “Balkanization” literature, the problem of enlargement politics is how it constructs enlargement as a one-way process in which “European” values, norms and

practices are exported to Balkans and how it is only the objects of the process, 'the Balkans', that change while 'Europe' is left untouched. Thus, postcolonial theory can help in understanding the ways in which knowledge and practice is transferred from the West to the non-West, in this case from the EU to the Western Balkan countries (Prasad, 2003).

### 3.1.2 Beyond essentialism: multiple layers of Europe and non-Europe

While Balkanisation literature contributes to an accumulating body of postcolonial studies on the power asymmetry between the "East" and the "West", many also point out that much has changed since the end of the Cold War and call for more nuanced and updated analysis on the East-West axis. Merje Kuus (2007), for example, argues that while Balkanizing narratives that essentialise the "East" and create east-west dichotomies have been very dominant in the early days of Eastern enlargement, there has been a gradual shift in the enlargement discourse during past decades. According to her, "the EU's less European and in some sense threatening periphery has become vaguer and more flexible: a single insecure Eastern Europe has been layered into many ones" (ibid., p. 151). Countries and regions are no more simply placed in Europe (proper) or the East (non-Europe), but instead possess different degrees of Eastness and Europeanness, depending on how well they converge to European norms. This also enables a new kind of disciplinary power for the EU, since the East "is framed as both secure and still being secured, and both Europe and still not fully European" (ibid., 152). For Kuus, this inscription of Eastness reduces complex societal issues and developments into a process of "catching up". Kuus's argument, thus, points to a similar conclusion than Hülse's path metaphor and Ole Wæver's approach to 'Europeanness' as a fragmented and ambiguous category (discussed in chapter 2). These conclusions in mind, the analysis in this thesis will look into whether both essentializing or "traditional" forms of colonialism and more ambiguous "multi-layering" can be found from enlargement discourse.

Another relevant perspective to EU-Other relations for this thesis is proposed by Jan Zielonka (2013), who sees the EU as a modern empire. According to him, the EU possesses the essential characteristics of an empire: "vast territorial unit with the ability to influence -- the international agenda and shape the notion of legitimacy (if not normality) in various parts of the world and especially in its neighbourhood" (ibid., 36). Although many see the EU as a historically unique

institution, Zielonka argues that “the EU does what all historical empires have always done, namely it exercises control over diverse peripheral actors through formal annexations or various forms of informal domination” (ibid.). He sees the EU as exercising normative power through civilizing missions, embodied in enlargement politics and other forms of conditional external relations. However, in contrast to Balkanization literature, Zielonka’s theoretical model leaves room for many types of agency and interaction, since he sees that the success or the failure of the EU’s imperial missions depend primarily on its ability to generate *legitimacy*, both internal and external. In his own words, “civilizing missions are seen as fulfilling their purpose if both metropolis and periphery view them as credible and desirable for a mixture of moral, historical, cultural and utilitarian reasons” (ibid., 37). Similarly, it has been proposed that the EU’s influence is based on its ability as a normative power (Manners, 2002) to use “soft power” or persuasion in contrast to stick and carrots of economic and military “hard power” (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2005). From the perspective of enlargement discourse, then, this would mean that while the enlargement process may well be one-directional, it should still seek to be legitimized by the candidate countries, otherwise it loses its appeal.

Furthermore, besides arguing for more complex and multi-layered approaches to enlargement discourse, recent studies also remind that black-and-white understandings of enlargement sometimes unduly treat candidate countries as passive victims. This runs a risk of creating and reinforcing one-sided understandings of the phenomena. Sonja Grimm (2019), for example, argues that the enlargement negotiations are more interactive than they are given credit for. It has also been argued that the “in-between” position of Eastern European countries in general can be beneficial, providing countries with bargaining power and different kind of agency (Miklóssy & Smith, 2019).

Overall, it could be argued that whereas power imbalances still clearly shape and frame the east-west- relations, this is clearly not the whole story; enforcing a dichotomy might prevent us from seeing different types of agencies in enlargement discourse.

### 3.2 Post-structuralist discourse theory and the logics approach

The way in which the social world and meanings are seen in this thesis is based on post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT), a post-structuralist approach developed notably by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, see also e.g. Jacobs, 2018; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). More specifically, the ontological and epistemological premise - as well as the empirical analysis - follow the Logics of Critical Explanation (hereafter “Logics approach”), a post-positivist approach developed by Jason Glynos and David Howarth (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, 2008). While putting in motion their own way of explanation in social science, the Logics approach builds on Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theoretical foundation, sharing their basic ontology and main premises. Importantly, theory and methodology are not here seen as separate realms of research, but closely intertwined. In this chapter, I will focus on introducing the main theoretical concepts and assumptions that are central for PDT’s understanding of the social reality, elaborate Logics approach in more detail and discuss its implications in the context of this thesis.

#### 3.2.1 Post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT)

*Whatever is called ‘Truth’ and adorned with capital letters masks its own contingency and untruth, even as it masks the capacity for being-otherwise.*

(Caputo, 2000, p. 36)

The origins of post-structuralist theories can be traced back to France in the late 1960s, where a new generation of thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida gained influence. At the time, the debate on structuralism was at its heights. While sharing similar “epistemic horizon” (Marttila, 2015), diverse post-structuralist approaches emerged as responses to structuralists’ claims of self-sufficiency. Since then, poststructuralist thinking has been influential in providing critical explanations of different social, political and cultural phenomena (Howarth, 2013). In the context of this thesis, it is important to point out that PDT has recently gained popularity in institutional research, for “its conceptualization of power, subjectivity, and ideas, as well as its critical perspective, holds great promise for the study of institutions” and institutional change and continuity, in particular (Jacobs, 2019, p. 379).

Post-structuralists share the idea of discursive and contingent nature of all social relations, practices and institutions (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Marttila, 2015). Discursivity and discourse are concepts that are used to explain the centrality of language and shared meanings in structuring the social world. Language is essential for (post)structuralists because it produces shared meanings and therefore constitutes social.<sup>21</sup> The analysis of these meanings is always contextual: as argued by Glynos and Howarth, “we cannot sever beings from the relational contexts in which they appear, and from the particular interpretations that constitute their meaning” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 30). The argument about the relational ontology of meaning was first made popular by Ferdinand de Saussure and became one of the main premises of structuralism. The idea of relational position is shared by poststructuralists alike. As described by Tomas Marttila (2015), Saussure’s genius was in how he understood that it was “not objects’ inherent phenomenal characteristics, but systems of signs conceptualizing them that defined our understanding of the objects referred-to” (p. 25). This is not to deny that things do not exist without language, but to argue that they do not have any independent meaning outside of their discursive field and their relative position in it. Neither does it entail that language is understood as a reified, organic system that exists independently of subjects. In contrast, in stressing how meanings are socially constructed, (post)structuralists have challenged positivist approaches that understand the social world as independent, “out there”, similar to all of us. Post-structuralists such as Glynos and Howarth, then, identify themselves (broadly) as post-positivists, insisting that there is no neutral way to conduct research, nor “independent yardstick beyond our interpretations which would allow us to leave them behind, and focus instead on the ‘procedures’ or ‘methods and techniques’ of science to determine the right answer” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 40). Instead, the empirical inquiry always starts from hermeneutics, through contextualized self-interpretations.

In addition to discursivity, the other cornerstone of the post-structuralist ontological framework is that all social structures are contingent, that is, possible but not necessary. As an important contrast to structuralists, then, the relative positions of meanings are not seen as stable or fixed, because the connections between signs are not given or necessary but change in ongoing

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<sup>21</sup> Although this thesis focuses on meanings in texts, discourse can be also non-verbal: images, practices, tones

language use (ibid.). Since all social objects are constituted as objects of discourse, this means that there is nothing “imperative or indispensable in how we understand the world” (Jacobs, 2019, p. 383). The notion of radical contingency highlights the non-necessary character of the status quo, opening room for critique; existing social reality is *possible* but not *necessary*. In fact, the way things seem to be “naturally” or necessarily as they are only because they are articulated or defined as such. Articulation is a way to use power by assigning meaning where the link between the material and the meaning is always contingent. The concept of articulation as the source of discourse is explained by Laclau and Mouffe as follows: “[W]e will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, p. 91).

However, these articulations of meaning are never final, since the condition of radical contingency means that no discourse is “ready” and can ever truly capture its object. This is because for post-structuralists, both the subjects and the objects are always-already incomplete and escape any comprehensive explanation or “fixation” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In terms of Jacques Lacan, this condition is expressed as the “lack in the symbolic Other” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 113)<sup>22</sup>. For the purposes of this thesis, it is here sufficient to understand that the radically contingent and structurally incomplete nature of all systems of social relations means that their re- and de-structuration remains always possible. This openness of the discursive field is captured in the concept of dislocation (ibid., p. 104). In moments of dislocation, the contingency of any discursive structure may become visible, thus challenging existing structures and opening new possibilities for identification.

For this thesis, adapting post-structuralist position means that EU enlargement policy is seen as a discursive structure in which the meanings are articulated by different subjects in the policy-making process. Thus, although enlargement strategies may have significant material consequences, they are not themselves but articulations of meaning that can be renewed or contested. Since articulations such as the enlargement strategies are the result of negotiations between different stakeholders, they can be seen as a site of power struggle over the articulation

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<sup>22</sup> For more detailed analysis on Lacanian ontology, see Glynos, 2001; 2008; Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008; Stavrakakis, 1999



of enlargement policy. The premise of radical contingency also suggests that this struggle is not finite, that is, enlargement policies are never “ready”, because as other social objects, they are structurally lacking and cannot be completed. Instead, we can treat enlargement strategies as kind of “snapshots” or moments in this ever-evolving discursive structure. They represent the articulation of the enlargement discourse in certain time and place and thus connect their present with the past and the future (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 105). Analysing these “frozen” images of enlargement, then, enables for analysis of change, continuity and contestation in the structure of meanings. This is where the concept of dislocation becomes crucial; in comparing the new enlargement methodology with the previous one, I understand the new methodology as a potential moment of dislocation. For Glynos and Howarth and their Logics approach, the way in which subjects react to dislocation is crucial; it defines whether the radical contingency is recognized or covered over with an ideological response. In the next chapter, I will move on to discuss the Logics approach and its implications in more detail.

### 3.2.2 Logics of Critical Explanation

Although different post-structuralist theories have gained popularity over the last decades, the approach has suffered from a lack of methodological developments. The Logics approach by Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007; 2008) propose a novel approach to this methodological deficit. Building on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the Logics approach focuses on four dimensions of social reality (social, political, ideological and ethical) and the role of three logics (social, political and fantasmatic) in critically explaining it. What is novel in this framework is how it challenges both the positivist and hermeneutic approaches by combining different elements from them. Thus, it enables a kind of “middle-range theorizing” that moves “between empirical phenomena, consisting of self-interpretations and practices, and our underlying ontological premises” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 164). For the purposes of this thesis, the strength of the Logics approach that it does not only focus on (critically) describing the existing norms but also asks how they have emerged and how they are defended, maintained, transformed or contested. This way, it is possible to assess the normative background of the enlargement discourse by analysing what is challenged in the new enlargement methodology, what has left untouched and how these decisions are argued for.

Previously, the Logics approach has been used in studying wide range of different public discourses such as UK banking reform (Glynos, Klimecki, et al., 2015), health policy (Glynos, Speed, et al., 2015), education policy (Andersson & Öhman, 2016; Clarke, 2012; Papanastasiou, 2018), urban austerity programmes (Fuller & West, 2017) and British EU-policy debates (Hawkins, 2015). More precisely, critical analysis of EU climate adaptation policy by Elise Remling (2018b, 2018a) and a critical reading of the EU's social innovation policy discourse by Fougere et al. (2017) have shown that the Logics approach can be fruitfully applied in critical analysis of different EU policies. In what follows, I will introduce the Logics approach in more detail by going through the central concepts and discussing how they are related to the research question at hand.

### *Ontological remarks*

The basic units of analysis in Logics approach are what Glynos and Howarth (2007) refer to as practices and regimes. A regime both structures and is comprised of social practices, that are the “ongoing, routinized forms of human and societal reproduction”, kind of sedimented ways of living, thinking and doing things (ibid., p. 104). These activities are captured in the concept of social dimension of social reality, in which subjects are “absorbed in their practices” and do not register the contingency of social relations (ibid., p. 112). As noted earlier, however, a dislocatory moment, or “a moment when a sense emerges, that things are not quite right” (ibid., p. 143) might provoke a disruption of the “business as usual” of social practices and provoke political practices that struggle to “challenge and transform the existing norms, institutions and practices” (ibid., p. 105). This is when the political dimension of social reality is foregrounded and the experience of dislocation is articulated as a public contestation of the existing social relations or attempts to neutralize such challenges in the name of a principle or ideal. Thus, political practices, when successful, can transform and institute a new regime of social practices (ibid., p. 105). In this thesis, I will treat the new enlargement methodology as a political practice and public contestation that seeks to (partly) challenge and transform the earlier social practices of enlargement politics in the name of “credibility, predictability, dynamism and stronger political steer”, as articulated by Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi (2020) .

As there is no primordial meaning before articulation, every social practice has political roots; however natural or necessary some practice may seem, it has a political history that has involved

the exclusion of some other possibilities (Glynos & Howarth 2007). Thus, a regime always has an outside that both constitutes its identity (what is it not) but also threatens its existence as such, because the frontiers of any regime can be re-drawn. Following Edmund Husserl's suggestion, then, the task of a researcher is to recognize and re-activate these political origins of regimes and practices in order to show the contingency of existing practices and to explore how the alternative options were excluded or repressed during the institution or sedimentation of the given practice (Husserl, 1970, p. 353–378). In this case, this means deconstructing the enlargement discourse and its normative background.

To understand this ontological horizon, it is important to point out that although social and political dimensions may overlap, they are both always present and not reducible to each other. Interpreting any phenomenon only through its social or political dimension would mean ignoring that “there is never a complete disappearance of political practices, nor a complete politicization of all social relations” (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 117).

While focusing on the political and social dimensions reveals whether the existing social order is publicly contested or not, the two other dimensions, ideological and ethical, capture the way in which subjects react to dislocatory moments. According to Glynos and Howarth, it is crucial how subjects are “either complicit in concealing the radical contingency of social relations (ideological dimension) or -- attentive to its constitutive character” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 14). In the former case, the response is ideological since the subject misrecognizes its “real conditions of existence”, that is, the radical contingency and the non-necessary nature of the social relations. In identifying with a particular discourse, the subject is “gripped” by an ideology that covers over radical contingency and makes all practices feel natural or given (ibid., p. 117). In contrast, an ethical response to a dislocatory moment would require the recognition of the contingent nature and a critical re-activation of its origins. Importantly, the ethical-ideological dimension does not necessarily coincide with the social-political axis; political practices can very well be ideological. This is the crucial aspect to remember while analysing potential change in discourses, existing social practices, such as enlargement strategy, can be contested without being attentive to the contingent nature of the regime and its practices, thus ignoring the very foundations of the regime. In other words, looking at the ideological-ethical dimension can help us to discover whether it is only the substance of social practices that is contested, as might be in the case of

ideological response, or the very assumptions behind these practices. In other words, this dimension can be used as a critical tool in exploring how fundamental or ideological was the change in enlargement methodology.

### *Logics – the basic units of explanation*

Whereas the four dimensions of social reality comprise the ontological framework of social reality, the three logics (social, political and fantasmatic) are used as the basic units of explanation in critically accounting the problematized phenomenon at hand. Simply put, it could be said that the three logics provide three different ways to address phenomenon, each answering different questions: what, how and why. Best described by Glynos and Howarth themselves: “if social logics assist in the process of characterizing what a practice is, political logics show how it is challenged and defended, then fantasmatic logics can be said to generate reasons for why practices are maintained or transformed” (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 108).

As all dimensions of social reality are present in practices and regimes, every logic is also important in providing critical explanations. It should be noted, however, that the principle aim is not to “discover” logics themselves, but to use them as tools in investigating “the ‘possibilities of phenomena’” (ibid., p. 135). Corresponding to the social dimension, social logics describe the status quo of sedimented practices and ask what has been taken for granted in the current discourse. In short, it constitutes “the social accepted ‘rules of the game’, the unsaid background of a discourse” (Remling 2018a, p. 4). Social logics are always tied to their particular context, which enables domain-sensitive analysis. In the context of this thesis, these would be the uncontested, taken-for-granted elements in enlargement strategies.

However, focus on social logic is not sufficient in explaining how and why certain social structure came into being. Political logics aims to tackle the emergence of discourses, asking “how a certain discourse evolves, functions and how its different elements are connected with each other” (Remling 2018a, p. 4). In contrast to social logics, which concern the following of the ‘rules’, political logics refer to the institution of these rules. By studying the development of a discourse, it is possible to identify moments of change and continuity as well as how discourse is challenged or institutionalized. Political logics are invoked in what Laclau and Mouffe call logics of equivalence

and difference (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). These refer to different articulatory strategies by which political frontiers are “stabilized, strengthened or weakened” through inclusion and exclusion (ibid.). In practice, using equivalence as an articulatory strategy could mean connecting different demands and subject positions in an equivalential chain by downplaying their differences and highlighting their similarities. In enlargement strategy, these are for example moments where the “common interests” of Western Balkan countries and the EU are highlighted. Alternatively, logics of difference would point out how the Western Balkans countries differ from the EU members or how some policy has nothing to do with another one. For example, while highlighting the common goals of enlargement politics, the responsibilities of member and candidate countries are differentiated so as to point out their inside and outside positions.

Lastly, the fantasmatic logics refer to the why-part of the question: why do some discourses prevail and are seen as natural, necessary or desirable? As noted earlier in separating between ideological and ethical dimensions of social reality, a dislocatory moment may be responded by either recognizing the radical contingency and the political origins of a discourse or covering over it. Fantasy here, understood in terms of Jacques Lacan, is the discourse that aims to cover the lack in the symbolic other, that is, the contingency of all social. Fantasy structures subject’s desires by concealing the fact that everything is unstable and there is no “closure” to reach. It provides subjects with traits of identification (such as political ideology, for example) and the (false) promise of a “fullness-to-come” (Remling, 2018b, p. 5) or an “illusion of a final fixation of meaning” leading to “a fully reconciled social order” (Hawkins, 2015, p. 143).

From analytical perspective, tracing fantasmatic logics enables to explain why some discourses and meanings prevail as hegemonic and manage to “grip” their subjects while others do not. In practice, it directs us to ask how certain social or political practices are *argued for* and what tactics of persuasion are used. Furthermore, Glynos and Howarth differentiate between “beatific” and “horrific” forms of fantasy. In practice, the former typically lays out the path to “fulness” or some kind of utopian fantasy, provided that some obstacle is removed, or the proposed course of action is taken (Remling, 2018b, p. 5). Correspondingly, horrific fantasy summons “a looming disaster that steals the enjoyment of a prosperous future” if the proposed action is not taken (ibid.). Simply put, fantasmatic logic focuses on the parts of discourse where the subject is persuaded through

causal claims. In enlargement discourse, these would be the parts of enlargement strategy claiming that something good or bad will happen if something is done or not.

In short, in this thesis the three logics are used to explore the normative background of the enlargement discourse by asking what are the unquestioned 'rules' of the enlargement policy (social logic), how are they contested or institutionalised (political logic) and argued for (fantasmatic logic). In chapter 4, I will discuss what this means in practice.

### 3.3 Conclusion: why is it important to combine postcolonial theory and PDT?

The idea for combining the postcolonial and post-structuralist theories in this thesis stemmed from two overlapping themes between these approaches: discursivity and critique. As discussed in this chapter, colonialism, balkanism or orientalism are more than just the material or military asymmetry or the formal forms of governance. According to Edward Said, imperialism requires "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (Said, 1993, p. 9). Here, the relationships between the metropolis and peripheries as well as the culture and discourses these relations produce are of central importance. Therefore establishing, maintaining and collapsing of colonialist structures cannot be understood outside or without different colonialist discourses. As pointed out by post-structuralists, this is not to say that material world does not matter but to argue that social meanings that are used to motivate and legitimate forms of social behavior, such as imperialism/colonialism, do not exist independently, "out there", but are produced and articulated in language and through culture and exist only in relation to other social meanings. In other words, "postcolonialism's deployment of the notion of discourse, -- is meant to highlight—in the context of exercise of imperial power—the mutual imbrication of the material and the ideological, and to emphasize the importance of not collapsing either of these categories into the other" (Prasad, 2003, p. 8). Although discourse from the ontological point of view is not in itself material, imperialism/colonialism can be seen as an example of how ideology and discourse can have fundamental materialistic consequences. On the other hand, the relation is not one-directional; material world and its realities (such as who has the most resources) also shape the platform for discourses. In the context of the EU enlargement, the importance of material and its link to colonial legacy is evident. As argued by József Böröcz (2001), "the very combination of wealth, power, centrality and privilege, which owes its existence

to the colonial past of the EU countries, constitutes the iron core of magnetism for the Eastern countries to even consider joining this elite club” (pp. 15-16).

For this thesis, adopting such ontological understanding means that enlargement discourse is understood both constituted in and constituting of the material world, shaped by (post)colonial structures. Consequently, I side with postcolonial theorists in arguing that any relations between the EU and its Others cannot be seen outside or somehow independent of the colonial legacies.

## 4. Methodology and data

*The researching subject leaves its trace through acts of judgement*  
(Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 186)

Whereas the previous chapter focused on the theoretical concepts of post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT) and the logics approach by Glynos and Howarth, this chapter will be devoted to issues that concern more directly the research practice, that is, how the empirical work is will be conducted. This thesis follows the logics approach, shares its epistemological premises and applies them to my own research. The empirical framework developed by Elise Remling (2018a, 2018b) will be used for operationalizing the logics approach in policy research. In what follows, I will first clarify the epistemological premises that guide the research process: retroduction, articulation and judgement. These premises are discussed in length, which I consider essential from the point of view of research ethics. I will then move on to introduce the data and finally discuss how Remling's analytical framework is applied in this thesis.

### 4.1 Epistemological principles: retroduction, articulation and judgement

Methodologically speaking, the aim of the logics approach is to challenge the so-called *causal law paradigm* in social science that puts emphasis on prediction and deduction, usually separating strictly between different phases of research, such as planning, execution and reporting (Glynos et al., 2009; Glynos & Howarth, 2007). The paradigm has also been criticized for undermining the historical and social context of the phenomena under study. While these shortcomings have been previously addressed by focusing either on *contextualized self-interpretations* or *causal mechanisms*, Glynos and Howarth argue that both of these fall short in challenging the paradigm in a meaningful way (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). In the logics approach, contextualized self-interpretations are seen as an important starting point for empirical inquiry, but insufficient for any generalizing research. Focus on causal mechanisms, in turn, builds on neo-positivist and critical realist theories, and therefore it fails in "escaping the shadow of the causal law paradigm" (Glynos et al., 2009, p. 9). The logics approach, then, seeks to oppose the causal law paradigm in an alternative way, by re-working and deconstructing the causal mechanisms and contextualized



self-interpretations (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, see chapters 2 & 3) and thus blurring the line between theoretical and the empirical as well as particular and universal.

Importantly, in the logics approach, social science explanation is understood as problem-driven, as opposed to method- or theory-driven. In practice, this means that the starting point for research is not any method of data gathering or analysis nor the intention to test a particular theory. Instead, the principal motivation is to problematize, explain and understand better the phenomena at hand, in this case the postcolonial EU enlargement discourse. Consequently, research in this thesis is not seen as a one-way process, but rather a (semi-)open practice, where the researcher moves back and forth between the theory and the empirical data. This is encapsulated in the philosophical concept of retroduction or abduction, that will be discussed in the following.

### *Retroduction*

In the logics approach, retroduction is seen as the guiding principle in engaging with the empirical material. The concept was originally coined by Charles Sander Peirce, who separates retroduction (or abduction)<sup>23</sup> as a third logic of reasoning between induction and deduction (Peirce, 1974/1934, 1935). While induction refers to reasoning that moves from observations to generalizations and deduction to subsumption that seeks to apply known theories to specific contexts, abductive reasoning can be defined as “selecting or inventing a provisional hypothesis to explain a particular empirical case or data set better than any other candidate hypotheses and pursuing this hypothesis through further investigation” (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018, p. 52). Peirce himself describes the differences between the three logics as follows: “Deduction proves that something *must be*; induction shows that something *actually is* operative; abduction merely suggests that something *may be*.” (Peirce, 1974/1934, 1935, p. 106).

Thus, in abduction, the researcher practices a sort of informed and reflective “guessing” in examining how the empirical observations fit together with existing knowledge and further modifying, elaborating or rejecting the theory by putting together different elements in order to

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<sup>23</sup> In his writings, Peirce uses different terms such as abduction, retroduction, presumption, and hypothesis when referring to this ‘third way’ of reasoning. The precise meaning of abduction in his writings also changed over time and is still debated (Koskela et al., 2018). Here, I use the terms retroduction and abduction interchangeably.

understand the phenomena under study (ibid.; Reichertz, 2014, p. 127). The strength of abductive or retroductive method is that while it is grounded in theoretical concepts (here the logics approach and postcolonial theory), it still leaves room for surprises and modification of the framework during the research process. This way, while there is a certain framework through which the data is approached, the limits of what can be found from the data are not defined beforehand. Indeed, Peirce himself sees abduction as the only logic that allows the researcher to come up with new ideas.<sup>24</sup> (Peirce, 1974/1934,1935, p. 106). While the separation of the three logics of reasoning is helpful in clarifying different ways of thinking and making decisions during the research process, I think that the whole process is better understood as what Kennedy and Thornberg call the interplay between induction, deduction and abduction:

Interplay between induction (in which the researchers are never *tabula rasa*), deduction (in which the researchers are always open to re-think, modify, challenge, and reject the theory or hypothesis in their interaction with data), and abduction (in which the researchers always consider their conclusions as fallible and provisional) creates powerful iterative processes between data collection and analysis, and between data and theory. In these iterative processes, qualitative researchers will not only situate their studies and their findings in the current knowledge base of the field but also contribute to it by extending, challenging, refining, or revising it.  
(Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018, pp. 61–62)

As described above, adopting this type of “iterative process” of combining and connecting different elements puts a heavy emphasis on the involvement of the researcher in the research process. To clarify how this impacts the way in which empirical inquiry is understood in this thesis, I will next turn to discuss articulation and judgement as integral aspects of research.

### *Articulation and the double hermeneutics*

Recalling the ontological assumptions of radical contingency and discursivity in post-structuralist theory and PDT in particular (see chapter 3), *both* the object and the subject of research are here seen as socially constructed. Thus, the social world is not understood as something that exists

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<sup>24</sup> For more detailed discussion on Peirce’s abduction and innovative thinking, see Koskela et al., 2018

independently, “out there” for researchers to study. Researcher is never able to analyse the social world from the outside through some neutral standards but is inevitably influenced by their own assumptions as well as the discourses they encounter while researching. However, this is not to say that scientific research cannot be conducted but rather points out that it requires a different kind of approach, one where the researcher does not assume neutrality and constantly pays attention to their position. From the methodological point of view, this means that research is pursued from a position of “double hermeneutics”, where the reflexivity of the research process is seen as two-fold, concerning both the object of the study and the researcher as an agent of knowledge production (Berenskoetter, 2011; Guzzini, 2000). Similar idea can be understood through the concept of articulation, central to PDT and the logics approach. Recalling Laclau’s and Mouffe’s definition of articulation from the previous chapter, it was defined as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, p. 91). Thus, articulation is the very act of giving meaning to concepts by “combining and connecting certain words, objects, ideas, and concepts in specific ways when they speak or act” (Jacobs, 2018, p. 298). When these articulations are repeated, they become sedimented structures of the social world, that is, discourses. Consequently, the object of critical discourse analysis is ultimately the *articulation* of different elements that form a discourse, such as the enlargement policy discourse. On the other hand, the researching subject is also articulative, since they articulate a particular research question and analytical setting by combining different elements and judging them as worthy of research. While this articulation may be well informed and preferably relies on earlier research, it is never neutral. Recognition of agency commits researchers to pay attention to their bias both for ethical reasons and transparency as well as for understanding themselves how the research process is influenced (Berenskoetter, 2011).

In this thesis, I problematize the EU enlargement discourse through post-colonialist critique and thus articulate enlargement discourse as something that should be studied from this particular perspective, which is in no way evident or necessary by any external, metaphysical law, but a choice I have made as a researcher and producer of knowledge. Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous chapter, this problematization is firmly rooted in earlier literature and is connected to a wider normative agenda of decentring Europe through post-colonial critique (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013).

## *Judgement*

This brings us to the question of judgement, that is, the decisions of the researcher as a part of the research process. While individual judgement and the following bias is often seen as a weakness of social science research vis-à-vis more universal standards in natural sciences, I here share Glynos and Howarth's critique of such tendency to measure the relevance of social inquiry against natural science's standards. Instead, in their logics approach, individual judgement of the researcher is seen as a *necessary* condition in conducting meaningful research on the social world through combining, connecting and generalizing. Thus, judgement is here understood as a combination of theoretical expertise, intuition, and articulatory practice rather than pure intuitionism.

What is important to realize here is that while the background of the researcher necessarily impacts the framings and interpretations carried out in this thesis, it also makes it unique. Combined with the radically contingent and constantly evolving nature of discourses, the research setting challenges yet another norm of traditional scientific practice, that of replication. This research cannot be repeated as exactly the same by me or anyone else, because a) the research is affected and relies on my own perception and b) because it is conducted in a specific historical time and place. While the "failure" of post-modern (here: constructivist and post-structuralist) epistemological cultures to comply with the standards of replication and repeatability has been a target of critique, I claim that insisting on replication as a strict standard in interpretative inquiry is in this case counter-productive and only renews the artificial catch-up position of social sciences in relation to natural sciences. I thereby agree with Freese and Peterson, who propose that "normative questions about replication for social scientists need to be understood on their own terms" (Freese & Peterson, 2017, p. 152). From the point of view of this thesis, this means that while the epistemological principles of double hermeneutics deny the possibility of replication of the exact same research, it does not mean that the research setting cannot be "scientific". Rather, the standards of good research are here defined differently from natural science, understanding transparency through reflectivity rather than absolute repeatability.

Besides acknowledging that the conditions and context of the research are always subjective, committing to post-structuralist epistemological culture also means that we cannot expect that

the replication of the research setting by somebody else would provide similar or directly comparable results. Since the research practice is interpretative, the 'results' are also necessarily tied to the judgement of the researching subject and context of the research, therefore open-ended and contestable. As argued by Glynos and Howarth, "the crucial ingredient of an articulatory (research) practice involves conceptualizing the relation between articulated elements as non-necessary or contingent" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 179). However, they also propose that identified logics (especially political and fantasmatic) could be transported (with caution) and utilized in comparative research, as long as one is sensitive to the differences between research contexts.

Thus, the importance of judgement of the researcher does not mean that the research process is completely subjective. Instead, following Glynos and Howarth, judgement should be understood as reflective and situational. (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 183). By reflective judgement, Glynos and Howarth refer to Immanuel Kant's analytical separation between determinative and reflective judgement:

If the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the judgement, which subsumes the particular under it is determinative – But if only the particular is given and judgement has to find the universal for it, then this power is reflective (Kant, 1987, pp. 18-19, cited in Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 183)

Thus, in "reflective judgement, one is confronted with a particularity for which no determinate concept is readily available or given" and the task of the researcher is to connect the particular with the general through synthesis of diverse elements (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 183).

Situational judgement, in turn, means that the researcher grows into their task while exploring the context; the judgement required to evaluate what something means in a specific context is acquired through "immersing oneself in a given discursive field" (ibid., p. 184). This idea circles back to Saussure and the relational ontology of meanings; the researcher can only understand what something means when they know the meanings around the meaning, that is, the context.

In terms of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1981), we could say that one has to be familiar with the particular "language-games" of the discursive field they are investigating. Indeed, Glynos and

Howarth propose that Wittgensteinian idea of family resemblance can help in applying theoretical concepts in empirical analysis (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 185). Family resemblance can be understood as the way in which concepts can be linked together as a group through overlapping similarities but without any one common definition (Wittgenstein, 1981). For example, the meaning of “game” is not any one feature but rather a collection of different, overlapping similarities between different games. In the logics approach, the idea of family resemblance helps in tracing logics, social logics in particular; while the logic of Eurocentrism, for example, can be said to refer to the prioritisation of things considered “European”, this logic can manifest itself in many different contexts. Even though these different contexts would not seem to have anything in common, we could still identify them through recognizing the logic of Eurocentrism through the theoretical term. This way, family resemblance works as a bridge, both operationalizing theoretical concepts and generalizing specific observations.

Altogether, the epistemological principles presented here highlight the role of the researcher in interpretative engagements. The aim of this research is not to access the “truth” of the meanings of enlargement discourse, because these meanings do not exist independently. Instead, I will critically assess the enlargement policy discourse from my own point of view, acknowledging my own role in this knowledge-producing project and aiming to articulate a persuasive narrative that helps to explain the enlargement discourse. This is concluded well by Kennedy and Thornberg, who describe the aims of the research process as follows:

Ultimately, the validity of the research can be judged according to whether it provides new lenses with which to view social problems, new insights into possible solutions, practical wisdom to guide action, and/or empathic experiences to motivate advocacy. (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018, p. 61)

With these epistemological premises in mind, I will now move on to introduce the data and the analytical framework used in this thesis.

## 4.2 Data

The data of this thesis consists of four enlargement policy papers, produced by the European Commission (EC) and publicly available on EC's website.<sup>25</sup> Two different types of documents are included: enlargement strategy papers and regular, annual communications on enlargement from years 2019 and 2020 (see table 1). While enlargement strategies map out more general guidelines for enlargement policy, annual communications take stock of the situation in the candidate countries and their compliance with the accession criteria. Typically, the strategy papers are not as regular but identify problems and challenges in enlargement policy and attempt to provide responses. Annual communications, in turn, reflect these strategies and keep track how well they are implemented in practice, that is, how well the candidate countries progress. Communications are released as a sort of introduction to the yearly Enlargement package and to the country-specific reports it contains.

Table 1: Data

Document number	Name of the document	Date	Type
1	A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans (EC, 2018)	6 February 2018	Strategy paper
2	2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy (EC, 2019)	29 May 2019	Annual communication
3	Enhancing the accession process- A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans (EC, 2020a)	5 February 2020	Strategy paper
4	2020 Communication on EU enlargement policy (EC, 2020b)	6 October 2020	Annual communication

Similar enlargement strategies and communications on accession countries are available from as early as 1998 onwards. Regarding the scope of documents that was possible cover for this thesis,

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<sup>25</sup> All documents available at European Commission's website: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en) (Accessed 28 September 2021, Path: European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Enlargement, Strategy and Reports)

the four most recent documents were selected since they represent recent developments in enlargement policy. Whilst other sources of data outside EC's official documents, such as European parliament and media data might have yielded more diverse insights, data collection was limited to EC for two reasons. First, although the decision making ultimately rests on the Member States, the EC is the most powerful actor in setting enlargement policy guidelines (see chapter 2). Secondly, as argued by Elise Remling (2018a, 2018b) in her similar analyses on EU climate policy, enlargement strategies and communications by EC can be seen as a part of same genre chain, meaning that documents are systematically linked together intertextually. This allows for *immanent critique*, in which the data is "turned against itself" through comparison (ibid.). This way, the comparability of the data improves, in contrast to analysing exclusively one document or comparing very different types of documents. Here the research setting differs from many other studies that operationalize the logics approach by attempting to include a variety of data sources and forming a sort of horizontal snapshot of the discursive field at hand. By analysing EC documents exclusively, I hope to get a focused and comprehensive understanding of EC as a normative actor in enlargement politics. The comparison of different enlargement discourses by different institutions or other actors is left to be pursued by further research. Due to the focus of this thesis, the data collection was limited to the material that concern Western Balkan countries and therefore the parts of the documents that discuss other accession countries (mainly Turkey) were left aside in the analysis

Before moving on to the analytical framework of the thesis, it should be highlighted that both types of policy documents are here understood through Carol Bacchi's (2009) definition of policy as "problematizing activity" that "includes but extends beyond laws and legislation" (p. xi; ix). This means that policies, by nature, imply that something needs to be changed, that is, there is a problem that needs "fixing". However, these problematisations are never neutral but endogenous to the policy-making context, articulating a particular understanding of the phenomena rooted in "deep-seated cultural assumptions" (ibid., p. x). According to Bacchi, then, critical policy research should shift focus from "solving" the assumed problems and pay attention to *what's the problem represented to be*, that is, what issues are centered in governing processes and what are left in the margins, or not questioned at all.



#### 4.3 Logics in practice: analysing policy papers

To conduct a qualitative analysis on EU enlargement policy documents, this thesis follows the analytical framework of Elise Remling, developed for operationalizing the logics approach in policy analysis. As described in the previous chapter, the logics approach aims to explain the normative background of discourse through three logics. This is done by asking what the unquestioned “rules” of the policy are (social logic), how they are contested or institutionlised (political logic) and how they are argued for or maintained (fantasmatic logic). In addition, following Laclau and Mouffe, political logic can be understood through the rhetoric strategies of *equivalence* and *difference* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). Logics of equivalence links together elements to form a discursive chain, while the logics of difference describes the way in which elements are disarticulated from the common chain (Jacobs, 2018). In practice, logic of equivalence in this data could mean, for example, that certain policy issues were defined as crucial to enlargement policy, whereas logic of difference could manifest itself in exclusion or marginalization of some policies. The fantasmatic logic, too, can be seen as divided into two sublogics: beatific and horrific. In practice, the former typically lays out the path to “fulness” or some kind of utopian fantasy, provided that some obstacle is removed, or the proposed course of action is taken. Correspondingly, horrific fantasy summons “a looming disaster that steals the enjoyment of a prosperous future” if the proposed action is *not* taken (Remling, 2018b, p. 5). In enlargement discourse, these would be the parts of enlargement strategy claiming that something good or bad will happen if something is done or not. The three logics and their sublogics are illustrated in table 2.

While the three logics and their sublogics are used as the main conceptual tools in analysing data, in Remling’s model they are supplemented with aiding concepts of *assumptions* and *genre chains*, borrowed from Norman Fairclough’s (2004) take on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This methodological choice stems from Remling’s own experience of analysing EU policy papers through the logics approach (Remling, 2018b). For her, tracing the fantasmatic logics turned out to be quite straight forward but defining the other two logics proved more challenging. According to Remling, this was due to the textual genre of policy documents which, in general, aims to present a coherent and ‘neutral’ narrative and therefore diminish any contradictions or competing ideas. Thus, the social and political logics in policy papers can be quite implicit. To

tackle this challenge and better access the underlying assumptions in policy documents, Remling applies Fairclough's division between three types of assumptions: existential, propositional and value assumptions. I also began with these aiding concepts as part of my analytical framework. I will discuss the applicability of the framework in my own analysis in the Chapters 5 and 6. The links between Fairclough's three assumptions and the three principal logics are illustrated in table 2.

In practice, the empirical analysis in this thesis was done through multiple rounds of close reading and coding of the policy documents with Atlas.ti- software (Atlas.ti 8 for Mac). Committed to the retroductive/abductive approach, the coding was partly open, involving both initial conceptual codes, but leaving space for observations outside these codes (Remling, 2018b, p. 7). The initial categories are the three logics and sublogics in table 2. Once all documents were coded, the segments classified in each category were analysed in order to identify and name different logics. Empirical material was read through postcolonial theoretical concepts that were used in identifying and naming logics, as well as in spotting silences in the empirical material. This way, the research problem was connected to a wider discussion on EU's normative agency and contributing to post-colonialist agenda of de-centring Europe (Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013). While the clarification of epistemological premises earlier in this chapter has shown that the research setting of this thesis is in no way "neutral", the intent behind adopting Remling's analytical framework has been, methodologically, to be as transparent as possible. The aim is also to demystify the interpretative coding process which is often under-reported in discourse analytic research. The three logics, supplemented with Fairclough's aiding concepts, offer a systematic way to approach empirical material, while carving out space for critique and thus supporting me to answer my research questions.

Table 2: Remling's analytical framework (2018a, p. 11), supplemented with explanations and examples from the data of this thesis

Logics	Sublogics	Aiding analytical concepts (Fairclough, 2004)	Examples
Social= the rules of the game		Existential assumptions= what is concerned as an existing fact	"The Western Balkans are part of Europe—the peoples of the EU and the region have a common heritage and history and future defined by shared opportunities and challenges" (EC, 2018, p. 1)
		Value assumptions= what is assumed to be desirable or undesirable	"It is of major importance to build more trust among all stakeholders and to enhance the accession process and make it more effective." (EC 2020a, p. 1)
Political= what is included, excluded, contested or instituted		Propositional assumptions=what "needs" to be done, i.e. assumptions of causality	"in order for the countries to meet all membership conditions, including strengthening their democracies, more serious, comprehensive and convincing reforms are required in crucial areas, notably on the rule of law" (EC 2019, p. 1)
	Logics of equivalence= what is included in the discursive chain		"Furthermore, for the accession process to be more effective, strategic communication will be instrumental. It is critical to raise awareness in the region of the opportunities closer integration and reforms entail, and to tackle malign third country influence." (EC 2020a, p. 2)
	Logics of difference= what is excluded from the discursive chain, what kind of antagonisms are created		"(T)here are still important bilateral disputesbetween countries in the region which remain to be solved. The EU will not accept to import these disputes and the instability they could entail." (EC 2018, p. 8)
Fantasmatic	Beatific/ fantasy		"Freedom of expression, as well as media freedom and pluralism, are pillars of democracy as they are essential components of open and free debate." (EC, 2020b, p. 6)
	Horrific/dystopia		"The countries most advanced in the accession process risk falling behind on their stated ambitious goals if they do not also significantly step up efforts, in particular on fundamental reforms." (EC 2019, p. 2)

## 5. Findings

This chapter presents my findings from the empirical material. The next chapter, Discussion, reflects their implications in relation to earlier research and the theoretical framework. In this chapter, I will first describe the coding process and discuss how the method was adjusted to better fit the aim of the research. I will then move on to present my analysis that seeks to answer the research question: *(how) is enlargement policy of the European Union (post)colonial?*

Following the logics approach, this question is approached from three different angles: what is taken for granted (social logic), what is sedimented or challenged (political logic) and how are these discourses argued for (fantasmatic logic).

From the beginning of the coding process, it became evident that while it was easy to find different logics from the empirical material, most parts of the data could not be categorized under one code. In practice, different parts of text cannot be said to belong only to a certain logic but instead the codes overlap and often appear together. The following citation, for example, clearly includes both beatific and proportional assumptions, signaling fantasmatic and political logics:

Together with improved regional cooperation, further efforts towards reconciliation are crucial to firmly anchor peace and ensure lasting stability in the region. The wounds of the 1990s still need time to heal. But 25 years on, it is time to address open issues with new vigour. All countries must unequivocally commit, in both word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past, by achieving reconciliation and solving open issues well before their accession to the EU. (EC, 2018, p. 6)

Here, as in many other parts of the material, fantasmatic elements (lasting peace, stability, reconciliation) are used to justify for political logics, that is, what needs to be done (improve regional cooperation, address issues with new vigour, etc.). At the same time, the political logics, “things that must be done”, are themselves fantasmatic: “overcoming the legacy of the past” can be seen as a normative goal that this discourse attempts to institutionalise *and* the fantasy that is used as the “ideological fuel” to legitimize enlargement politics.

Also, while the categories of three assumptions (Fairclough, 2004) and aiding concepts (Remling, 2018a; 2018b) were helpful in identifying logics from the material, it became evident that they were, too, hard to tell apart. Phrases such as “for the accession process to be more effective, strategic communication will be instrumental” can be interpreted both as propositional assumption (this needs to be done), but also involving logic of equivalence by adding new signifier (strategic communication) to the chain of equivalence (effective accession process). Furthermore, one could detect also a value assumption (accession should be effective), signaling the social logic of the discourse.

Another observation was that many times the social logics (what is taken for granted) and the political logics worked together to produce the third, fantasmatic logic. This is often done by first painting the picture of the current situation (social logic, existential assumption) and then describing how things should be:

Organised crime remains a very serious issue in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Important smuggling routes run through Turkey as well as the Western Balkans. Powerful criminal networks with an international reach continue to operate from and via these countries. -- Some countries can only demonstrate a handful if any final convictions for organised crime or money laundering in recent years. Such poor results show the ineffectiveness of criminal procedures, give strong signals of impunity, and contribute to the risk of criminal infiltration of the political and economic systems. Countries also need to increase significantly the seizure and confiscation of assets in both organised crime and corruption cases, and to tackle criminal groups more forcefully. (EC, 2019, p. 4)

At first, the fact that the codes overlap so much raised a question about the applicability of this approach to the empirical material at hand. In building the theoretical and empirical framework, I expected that I could systematically code the whole data into separate logics and thus be able to conduct further, even quantitative analysis on how much of each logic can be found and how the different codes correlate. However, I soon realized that coding specific coder per phrase/paragraph was not only impossible but did not either help me to tap into what is most interesting, that is, the “spirit” of the different logics across the material. I understood that

instead of staring at the specific phrases, I needed to look beyond small units of text to get a fuller picture of the ideological horizon. The original way to process the material was thus replaced by treating the material more as a whole, “discursive blanket” or a narrative where different logics are interwoven. Thus, the three parts of the following analysis represent different aspects or dimensions of the material rather than separate parts of it.

The empirical material is quite uniform in style and substance. All of the four documents begin with an introduction, where the meaning and importance of enlargement policy is argued for and the current situation described briefly. Here, the documents are contextualized by referring to earlier documents and other milestones of the enlargement process, such as summits and declarations. The enlargement policy is also put into a wider context by describing its meaning to the whole Union. The introduction parts proved to be the most fruitful for this analysis, since they are used to argue for and legitimize the enlargement policy. The language in these parts was also more explicitly ideological than in the other parts. The introductions are followed by general remarks on different policy areas and country-specific recommendations. These parts are more technical. As a general remark, the tone in the material is often passive; something needed to be done, but it is not often specified by whom.

## 5.1 Social logics

Overall, the style of the text does not leave much room for ambiguity or reflection but is declarative in nature and thus rich in social logics. According to my interpretation, social logics in this material were most distinguishable as certain mantras that were repeated throughout the documents. Stated as undisputed facts, these can be said to partly form the “unsaid normative background” of the discourse.

### *Social logic 1: “credible” EU enlargement policy is a virtuous circle*

Perhaps the most significant and integrated mantra in these documents is the idea of enlargement as a virtuous circle, which was repeated (though in slightly different forms) in all the documents:

This firm, merit-based prospect of full EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the Union’s very own political, security and economic interest. In times of

increasing global challenges and divisions, it remains more than ever a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe. A credible accession perspective is the key incentive and driver of transformation in the region and thus enhances our collective security and prosperity. It is a key tool to promote democracy, rule of law and the respect for fundamental rights, which are also the main engines of economic integration and the essential anchor for fostering regional reconciliation and stability. Maintaining and enhancing this policy is thus indispensable for the EU's credibility, for the EU's success and for the EU's influence in the region and beyond-especially at times of heightened geopolitical competition. (EC, 2020a, p. 1)

This mantra can be said to represent the main ideological narrative of the enlargement process: enlargement is first and foremost EU's own interest that promotes three main goals: security, economical prosperity and EU's influence in the world. These can be said to represent both existential and normative assumptions: the kind of "virtuous circle" of integration described in the citation is both believed to exist and to be desirable:

A core objective of the European Union's engagement with the Western Balkans is to prepare them to meet all the requirements of membership. This includes supporting fundamental democratic, rule of law and economic reforms and alignment with core European values. This will in turn foster solid and accelerated economic growth and social convergence. (EC, 2020a, p. 2)

The logic of enlargement as a virtuous circle ties skillfully together the different interests, fears and goals of the EU, concluding that "credible accession perspective" is in fact "indispensable" for the EU. Enlargement is not only a sectoral policy goal, but "part and parcel of the larger strategy to strengthen the Union by 2025" (EC, 2018, p. 1).

Although the interconnectedness between different security, economical and geostrategic interests is here understood as a social logic, it can be also approached through the political logics of equivalence; different signifiers are connected to the discursive chain of enlargement. Enlargement is not only about geographical expansion, but also about security, stability, economy

and so on. Besides EU's own, pro-active policy, enlargement is here also defined as a response or reaction to "increasing global challenges and divisions" (EC, 2020a, p. 1). The assumption that there is such challenges and divisions serves well in legitimating enlargement as a "geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe" (ibid.). This example also demonstrates well how social and fantasmatic logic are intertwined in the empirical material.

### *Social logic 2: joining the EU is a choice*

Another recurring mantra is that joining EU is an available choice for the candidates: "Joining the EU is a choice, and one that requires sharing the principles, values and goals the Union seeks to promote in its neighborhood and beyond" (EC, 2018, p. 9). This is often paired with statements such as "the EU accession process continues to be built on established criteria, fair and rigorous conditionality, and the principle of own merits" (EC, 2019, p. 10) or "accession is and will remain a merit-based process fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each country" (EC, 2018, p. 2). These mantras discursively construct the enlargement process and EU membership as a technical, well-established process where joining the Union is equally possible for every country, just one "choice" away. The narrative of choice also stresses the normative or moral aspect of enlargement: the "choice for Europe" should be sincere, absolute and irreversible:

--joining the EU is a choice. It needs political and societal consensus and the support of the hearts and minds of the people. (EC, 2018, p. 3)

[Joining the EU] is a generational choice, based on fundamental values, which each country must embrace more actively, from their foreign and regional policies right down to what children are taught at school. (ibid., p. 2)

Accession to the European Union is a process requiring and supporting fundamental reform and political and economic change in the countries aspiring to join, and also to demonstrate the ability to take on the shared responsibilities as a Member State of the EU. *It is not moving on autopilot but must reflect an active societal choice* on their part to reach and respect the highest European standards and values. (EC, 2020a, p. 3)



Success in accession process is said to be entirely in the hands of candidate countries and dependent on candidate countries' ability to make this "generational choice" (EC, 2018, p. 2) between past and future, backwardness and modernisation.

With strong political will, the delivery of real and sustained reforms, and definitive solutions to disputes with neighbours, they could potentially be ready for membership in a 2025 perspective. This perspective is extremely ambitious. Whether it is achieved will *depend fully on the objective merits and results of each country*. (EC, 2018, p. 2, emphasis added)

The enlargement perspective of the Western Balkans is first and foremost in the hands of the countries themselves. (EC, 2018, p. 9)

Looking at how the enlargement criteria has changed and become stricter during the past decades (Dimitrova & Kortenska, 2019) and how slow the Western Balkan accession has been, it is evident that progress in "EU path" is not only about the merits of each country. There are many other variables that affect the negotiations, notably EU's own internal and external interests and developments. At the same time, however, it is often stressed that the EU, (member states and the Commission) is expected to better fulfill its responsibilities and that it should take more responsibility in advancing the accession process. The different agencies will be discussed further in the next chapter. This is just one example of how the material is filled with different social logics that sometimes complement and sometimes contradict each other.

### *Social logic 3: EU is committed, and progress has been made*

One of the most unquestioned messages in the material is that the enlargement perspective has had EU's "univocal support" since the Thessaloniki summit in 2003 and that ever since, progress has been made. The documents build a narrative of continuous progress by listing every achievement there has been and describing how unified, determined and systematic the Union has been in advancing accession:

The EU has long been strongly engaged in the region. From the Thessaloniki European Council in 2003, it has supported the future of the region as an integral part of the EU. Since then, the European perspective of the region has helped the countries to achieve overall political and economic reforms with improved democratic processes. Visa liberalisation and much improved regional cooperation are fostering more open societies. (EC, 2018, p. 1)

The EU's enhanced engagement with and commitment to the region over the last year is already yielding concrete and significant results. North Macedonia not only continued its ambitious reform agenda, but also reached a historic agreement with Greece resolving a 27- year old name dispute. This, together with the bilateral agreement with Bulgaria, is an example of how to strengthen good neighbourly relations for the entire region, and *testimony to the power of attraction of the European perspective*. (EC, 2019, pp. 1-2, emphasis added)

The narrative of progress is coupled with a narrative of commitment that is repeatedly required from both parties, the EU and the candidates. Especially the devotion of the candidate countries to the process is questioned throughout the material, and often identified as an obstacle for progress:

All countries must unequivocally commit, in both word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past, by achieving reconciliation and solving open issues well before their accession to the EU. (EC, 2018, p. 17)

All political leaders in the region must live up to the reform expectations of their citizens and leave no doubt as to their strategic orientation and commitment to join the EU. (EC, 2019, p. 2)

An even stronger focus on meeting the interim benchmarks in the rule of law area is vital. These requirements and conditions are already clearly spelt out by the Commission in its regular reporting. The countries' leaders must now tackle the existing challenges forcefully and with clearer commitment. (EC, 2018, p. 8)

On the other hand, the EU's lack of commitment is also criticised, notably in the latest documents. Lack of "unwavering" commitment to the enlargement process is seen as a threat to the Union's credibility:

For the accession process to regain credibility on both sides and deliver to its full potential, it needs to rest on solid trust, mutual confidence and clear commitments on both sides. It means the Western Balkans leaders must deliver more credibly on their commitment to implement the fundamental reforms required,-- EU Member States and citizens have legitimate concerns and need to be reassured of the unequivocal political will of the countries, proven by structural, tangible reforms. --. This also means the European Union delivers on its unwavering commitment to a merit based process. --All parties must abstain from misusing outstanding issues in the EU accession process. In the same vein, Member States and institutions must speak with one voice in the region, sending clear signals of support and encouragement, and speaking clearly and honestly on shortcomings when they occur. (EC, 2020a, p. 2)

As the last sentence of the citation indicate, credibility is understood to require unity: the EU is expected to speak with one voice. Interestingly, clarity and honesty are also linked to credibility.

Overall, "commitment" and "recommitment" are important signifiers in the enlargement discourse, although their concrete meaning is quite vague. Together with verbs such as "support", they seem to be used to cover over lack of concrete results. Furthermore, the recurrent use of expressions such as "reconfirmed" and "recommitted" illustrates how the maintaining of the enlargement discourse requires repeating *performance of commitment*:

At the EU-Western Balkans summit, which took place in Sofia in May 2018, EU leaders *reaffirmed their unequivocal support* for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, and the Western Balkan partners recommitted to this perspective as their *firm strategic choice*. (EC, 2019, p. 1)

At the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 6 May 2020, the EU leaders *reaffirmed* the Union's determination to intensify further its engagement with the region and welcomed the pledge of the Western Balkan partners to carry out necessary reforms thoroughly and vigorously. (EC, 2020b, p.1)

The European Commission's Western Balkans Strategy of February 2018 provided a major boost for the region's European path. It *reconfirmed* the future of the Western Balkans as an integral part of the EU. It *reiterated* that the prospect of EU membership based on meeting firm, established criteria is in the Union's very own political, security and economic interest. It confirmed the significant progress the region has made both on reforms and towards overcoming the legacy of war and conflict. (2019, p. 1)

## 5.2 Political logics

Overall, political logics could be seen as a sort of "meta-logics" of this material. As a policy paper, its purpose is to assess and guide enlargement policies and therefore to sediment a certain understanding of the accession process while challenging and framing some aspects of the existing situation as problematic (Bacchi, 2009). In tracing political logics, I paid specific attention to parts that argued how things ought to be, as well as parts that built chains of equivalence and difference, as seeking to articulate and institutionalise certain elements as connected and some as disconnected.

### *Political logic 1: simultaneous logics of equivalence and difference*

Logics of equivalence and difference (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987) as aiding analytical concepts helped me to discover what is one of the most interesting feature of the empirical material. This is the material's tendency to present contradictory statements that simultaneously include and exclude the Western Balkan states and region from the EU/ Europe. This was visible in the material as simultaneous logics of equivalence and difference, that I call here a *discursive double move*. In the following, I illustrate this double move with examples from the material.

Perhaps the most common form of the simultaneous exclusion and inclusion is how the Western Balkans region is simultaneously placed both in Europe/EU and outside or on its way to Europe/EU. “European perspective” and “European path” are common expressions in the material, placing candidate countries somehow into the European space (or in relation to it) while simultaneously pointing out that they are not quite there yet. There is also an interesting temporal aspect to be found: the region is seen as *historically* part of Europe and its *future* is in Europe, but right now it is somewhere else:

The Western Balkans are part of Europe, geographically surrounded by EU Member States. The peoples of the EU and the region have *a common heritage* and history and a *future defined by shared opportunities and challenges*. (EC, 2018, p. 1, emphasis added)

An investment in the Western Balkans is an investment in Europe. Investments will only increase if economic governance is strengthened, and structural reforms pursued to increase competitiveness. (EC, 2018, p. 12)

Interestingly, it is many times stressed how the WB6 countries have already benefitted from their accession processes, their journey towards becoming European, as if seeking legitimization for the lack of progress in becoming actual members:

Everyday life in the Western Balkans should progressively become closer to life within the European Union. Ultimately, citizens yearn to live in countries that are prosperous and equal, where the rule of law is strong and corruption is rooted out. This strategy sets out how with increased support from the EU, including through participation in certain Union policies and programmes, the Western Balkan countries can already benefit from an increased stability and prosperity that will in turn facilitate progress on their European paths. (EC, 2018, p. 2)

Although some progress is recognized, a clear distinction is made between the current state of the candidate countries and “European standards”. The logic of difference between the EU and the Balkans is produced by highlighting this gap:

Despite some acceleration of growth, job creation and increases in income in the last years, the countries are still lagging behind in reforming their economic structures and improving competitiveness. (EC, 2019, p. 7)

The European perspective of the Western Balkans is clear and unambiguous and the conditions and criteria for EU membership are well established. -- Much work lies ahead for the countries concerned to be in a position to meet these criteria. Governments must ensure more inclusive reform processes that bring all stakeholders and society at large on board. (EC, 2018, p. 18)

We can also compare the following two extracts from 2019 and 2020 and see that there is consistency in the way the differences between the EU and the Western Balkans are discussed

The Western Balkans have taken important steps in recent years to modernise the legal and institutional framework regarding the fight against terrorism. Operational cooperation with EU Member States and EU agencies has continued to improve and intensify. -- Nevertheless, most countries still need to step up efforts to address the issue of returning foreign fighters and to prevent extremism and radicalisation, including in prisons. Online monitoring and response capacities need to be enhanced. Pro-active tracing of financial flows should be anchored in a more strategic approach against money laundering and terrorism financing. (EC, 2019, p. 4)

One positive element has been that the Western Balkans' operational cooperation with EU Member States and EU agencies has continued to improve and intensify in the fight against terrorism and radicalisation leading to violent extremism, as well as migration and border management. However, credible progress in the rule of law area remains a significant challenge, which often correlates with a lack of political will, continuing existence of certain elements of state capture, limited progress on judicial independence, institutional resistance and an increasingly difficult environment for civil society. (EC, 2020b, p. 4)

Throughout the material, such narrative of insufficient action is repeated. The political logic that is being constructed is that the candidate countries have not made enough progress - the progress is often "limited".<sup>26</sup> Hereby the region is both included by setting the fantasmatic future of the candidates inside the EU and excluded by stating that they are not there yet. As mentioned earlier in the context of social logic, there is an assumption or at least a mantra of achieved progress decoupled with the political logic of insufficient action:

While none meets these criteria today, the region has come a long way since the end of the 1990s. Overall, significant progress has been made both on reforms and on overcoming the devastating legacy of war and conflict. But in order for the countries to meet all membership conditions and strengthen their democracies, comprehensive and convincing reforms are still required in crucial areas, notably on the rule of law, competitiveness, and regional cooperation and reconciliation. (EC, 2018, p. 3)

Another example of the double discursive move of inclusion and exclusion is how the Western Balkans region is simultaneously portrayed both as one, homogeneous entity and a diverse group of individual countries. The region is understood to share such similar characteristics, challenges, and possibilities that it can be addressed and described as one actor, "the Western Balkans": "The Western Balkans have taken important steps in recent years to modernise the legal and institutional framework regarding the fight against terrorism" (EC, 2019, p. 4). At the same time, however, the merits and shortcomings of each individual country in all the different policy areas are highlighted and compared against each other. This sort of competitive setting is often created in the documents by first stating a shared principle or a policy goal and then ranking candidate countries against it. Some countries are endorsed while some are taken as warning examples:

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<sup>26</sup> In the material, the progress in different policy areas is often evaluated through a scale of "no progress", "limited progress", "some progress" or "good/credible progress" and "significant progress" "Objective progress" is often used to signal the commitment to standardized, merit-based process.

In the coming years, all Western Balkan countries will have the chance to move forward on their respective European paths, on the basis of their own merits and at the speed at which they achieve them. Montenegro and Serbia are the current front-runners in the process and the following subsection illustrates the remaining milestones on their paths. Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are making significant progress on their European path and the Commission is ready to prepare recommendations to open accession negotiations, on the basis of fulfilled conditions. -- With sustained effort and engagement, Bosnia and Herzegovina could become a candidate for accession. Kosovo has an opportunity for sustainable progress through implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and to advance on its European path once *objective circumstances* allow. (EC, 2018, p. 7, emphasis added)

A well-functioning and independent judiciary, where decisions are effectively implemented, is of crucial importance for the rule of law. Albania made important progress towards reforming its judicial system, which continues on schedule. - However, throughout the Western Balkans region, reforms continue to suffer from a slow pace of change in judicial culture. In Serbia, constitutional amendments intended to align the constitution with European standards for the judiciary have not yet been passed. (EC, 2019, p. 4)

The proper functioning of democratic institutions remains a key challenge in most countries.-- In the Western Balkans, constructive dialogue across the political spectrum, notably within the parliaments, remains to be established. Counter-productive parliament boycotts such as in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia remain of concern. Citizens' protest demanding reforms have increased. Mediation and dialogue mechanisms, such as those offered by the European Parliament, could be used, for example in Serbia. (EC, 2019, p. 3)

The Western Balkans -- continue to show widespread corruption. Robust results in the fight against corruption are needed to mitigate the real threats to democratic



structures and for a stable and transparent business environment. Progress in successfully fighting high and medium level corruption varies across the region although the overall pace has slowed down and the track record in most countries is far from meeting the requirements for membership. -- One positive sign of engagement is the agreement of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia to participate in the Sofia priority action on monitoring of trials in high-level corruption and organised crime cases; further discussion in this regard is needed with Serbia. (EC, 2020b, p. 5)

The historic agreement reached with Greece put an end to a longstanding dispute and is an example of reconciliation for the region and Europe as a whole. (EC, 2019, p. 15)

Thus, the enlargement process of the WB6 countries is pictured both as individual “paths” as well as a common race between countries. Here, the destinies of each candidate country are independent...

The countries may catch up or overtake each other depending on progress made -- Accession is and will remain a merit-based process fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each country. (EC, 2018, p. 2)

...as well as interdependent:

All countries must abstain from misusing outstanding issues in the EU accession process. As a matter of principle, the frontrunners on the EU path have a strategic interest in being advocates, not spoilers, of the aspirations of their neighbours. *The countries of the region are inter- dependent* and will progress faster if they help each other along the way. (EC, 2018, p. 7)

These contradictory double moves of inclusion and exclusion create an impression of uncertainty and ambiguity in the material. This ambiguity is further enforced by open-endedness of the accession process. While it is repeated many times that the process is clear, transparent, and well-

established, the EU reserves all the rights to control the accession. The enlargement process includes moving goals such as the “interim benchmarks”:

Once the interim benchmarks are met, the setting of closing benchmarks will provide an opportunity for the EU to clearly set out the rule of law requirements that negotiating countries will ultimately have to meet to be ready for EU membership in this crucial area. (EC, 2019, p. 5)

Setting the closing benchmarks will provide an opportunity for the EU to clearly spell out the requirements Montenegro will have to meet prior to the closing of these two chapters. (EC, 2020b, p. 20)

#### *Political logic 2: agency*

Another political logic that is interesting for this analysis is the logics of agency. How is agency institutionalised or contested in the documents? Who is expected to act and how? The different roles of the EU and the candidate countries in the enlargement process are visible in how their responsibilities are described. The EU “supports”, “monitors”, “surveils”, “gives signals” and “is committed”. From these documents, the EU emerges as a stable and united actor that oversees and guides the reforms in the candidate countries in a consistent and sustained manner. The EU sets the rules and it is best for everyone if they are followed as thoroughly as possible:

An early alignment with the EU acquis, together with an effective public internal control system, is required to reduce wasteful use of resources, fraud and corruption. (EC, 2019, p. 6)

However, it is stressed that the EU has a fair share of responsibilities in the accession process. In fact, successful enlargement is the historical responsibility of the EU, both for its own future and credibility and for the Western Balkans region, as seen already in the context of social logic of “virtuous circle”.

The EU must stick to its commitments and respond clearly and positively to the objective results achieved by the countries in relation to the conditions it has set.

This is a strategic investment not only in the region's future, but first and foremost in the EU's own political and economic interest. (EC, 2019, p. 11)

The Union must live up to its commitments and give credit where credit is due. Failure to reward objective progress by moving to the next stage of the European path would *damage the EU's credibility* throughout the region and beyond. (EC, 2019, p. 2, emphasis added).

The documents also repeatedly underline how much the EU has done and continues to do for the region. This can be seen as a proof of commitment and devotion but also as a plea for gratitude and, perhaps, legitimacy for the EU's policies and the enlargement process as such.

The EU, while being seriously affected itself by this crisis, has provided extensive support to the efforts of the governments in particular in the Western Balkans to address those challenges.-- The EU-Western Balkans cooperation and support from the EU goes *far beyond what any other partner* has provided to the Western Balkans reflecting the region's strategic anchoring. (EC, 2020b, p. 1, emphasis added)

However, there is differentiation between what is expected from different institutions and actors within the Union. The agency of the Commission is naturally active and dominant, as this material is produced by them (the word "commission" is mentioned 248 times in the documents). Many of the aims and interests of the Commission are clearly visible and they are not openly contested.

The Commission will further extend support to reconciliation initiatives, including those that address transitional justice and seek to overcome the legacy of recent conflict. There will be a continuation of support for the work of Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. The Commission will also explore how best to further the work of International Committee for the Red Cross and the International Commission on Missing Persons in fostering regional cooperation to resolve the issue of missing persons and examine what more can be done to reduce the scourge of landmines. (EC, 2018, p. 15)

The voice and the standing of the Commission are also visible in how the other actors are presented. The Member States, in particular, get their share of criticism: according to this

material, they should be more active and constructive in the accession process and refrain from using enlargement for advancing their own interests. For the Commission, Member States' role is also to act as peer supporters, sharing their knowledge on how to become good Europeans:

There is great benefit in increased Member States' and experts' contributions to support and bring pressure to bear on reform implementation. More detailed rule of law assessments should be undertaken and advisory missions extended to the whole Western Balkans, building on the experience of the earlier advisory missions. Monitoring of implementation and enforcement should be enhanced including through more systematic, case-based peer-reviews organised by the Commission with the participation of Member State experts. (EC, 2018, p. 10)

Member states and their individual interests and bilateral disputes are seen as a threat to enlargement and the unity of the EU in general, which is clearly the Commission's priority. This "dystopia" of fragmented or polarised EU will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The Western Balkan countries, in turn, are expected to "step up" or "redouble" their efforts. They are portrayed as insufficient, incomplete, and too passive and they are expected to reform, align, adapt and implement. It is very clear that the progress—or the lack thereof—is understood to be on the shoulders of the candidate countries and dependent on their ability to fundamentally reform the structures of their societies:

It is now up to the countries' authorities, with the support of their societies, to take ownership and deliver on the well-known conditions for accession. (EC, 2018, p. 3)

All the Western Balkan countries must now urgently redouble their efforts, address vital reforms and complete their political, economic and social transformation, bringing all stakeholders on board from across the political spectrum and from civil society. (EC, 2018, p. 2)

For the process to move forward, accession candidates need as a matter of priority to deliver more swiftly genuine and sustainable results on key issues. (EC, 2019, p. 11)

As described earlier, the candidate countries are also differentiated as individual countries. Agency is also given to different actors within the countries. For example, the leaders of the region are expected to “take full ownership and lead by example” (EC, 2018, p. 7), “tackle the existing challenges forcefully and with clearer commitment” (ibid., p. 8) and “take concrete steps to promote an environment conducive to reconciliation” (EC, 2020b, p. 25). They “must leave no doubt as to their strategic orientation and commitment” (EC, 2019, p. 2) as “it is they that ultimately must assume responsibility for making this historical opportunity a reality” (EC, 2018, p. 18). These demands signal some level of mistrust towards the leaders of the region and their commitment to the “European perspective”. Interestingly, the “leaders” are also addressed here as one, coherent group.

The role of opposition and the civic society are also recognised as significant for the enlargement process. Opposition, in particular, is expected to “perform” their “constructive role” in the spirit of democracy, but nevertheless contribute to the “pro-European consensus”:

Opposition parties, which also bear significant responsibility in shaping the future of their countries, should have the possibility to fully perform their role and engage in democratic processes-- Governments need to ensure that the opposition has the possibility to fully perform its role within the existing frameworks. And the opposition needs to engage constructively in the democratic process. (EC, 2019, p. 3)

Governments need to ensure that the opposition has adequate conditions to perform its democratic control function. At the same time, the opposition needs to engage in the democratic processes. (EC, 2020b, p. 11)

Albania: Opposition parties, most of which relinquished their parliamentary mandates in February 2019, should constructively re-engage in the democratic institutions and commit to a broad European consensus. (EC, 2019, p. 15)

Serbia’s political scene is marked increasingly by polarisation and a shrinking space for diverging political opinions. There is an urgent need to create more space for genuine cross-party debate, in order to forge a broad pro-European consensus, which is vital for the country’s progress on its EU path. (EC, 2019, p. 14)

The last quotation is an interesting example of the kind of contradictory double standards that can be detected from the material: a candidate country is expected to promote liberal democracy as long as all the actors are “pro-European”. Similarly, the citizens or the peoples of the candidate countries are expected to be pro-European and to understand that the EU membership is for their own benefit:

It is now up to the countries' authorities, with the support of their societies, to take ownership and deliver on the well-known conditions for accession.-- Ultimately, the region's citizens will judge their own governments on whether or not they are willing and able to deliver on their European ambitions. (EC, 2018, p. 3)

-- There can be no ambiguity by leaders about where the Western Balkans belong and the direction in which they are heading. This is necessary to secure and sustain the *support of their own and of EU citizens*, and must be reflected in leaders' communications and outreach to citizens. (ibid., p. 3, emphasis added)

By providing clear and tangible incentives of direct interest to citizens, the EU can encourage real political will and reward results arising from demanding reforms and the process of political, economic and societal change. (EC, 2020a, p. 5)

Although there is a clear distinction and a division of labor between the EU and the Western Balkan countries, the documents also construct enlargement process as a joint effort that proves Western Balkans' compatibility with the EU:

--both sides should show more leadership and live up to their respective commitments in public, while coming in more directly on matters of concern. (EC, 2020a, p. 3)

The ongoing pandemic has clearly demonstrated how the EU and the Western Balkans are tackling common challenges together. (EC, 2020b, p. 1)

In fact, it seems that although the responsibility to reform and change is appointed to the Western Balkan countries, there is an assumption that these countries *need* the EU to fulfill their fantasies or “European perspectives”:

The EU remains the main external driver of growth and jobs in the Western Balkans. The full adherence of any foreign economic activity to EU values, norms and standards is key for the region’s success. (EC, 2019, p. 11)

### *Political logic 3: historical window of opportunity*

As political logics is here understood as ways in which something is contested or institutionalised, an important finding was the way in which enlargement is temporally framed. Based on the two first documents, in particular, there is a “historical window of opportunity” and a new “momentum” that both the Union and the candidate countries should take as a matter of urgency: “to make the ambitious best-case scenario a reality, action must be taken now” (EC, 2018, p. 3). This rush can be seen as a response to the recent enlargement fatigue and a lack of motivation and commitment on both sides. Interestingly, the two more recent documents do not include any references to “historical opportunity” – perhaps due to the pandemic.

The Western Balkan countries now have a historic window of opportunity to firmly and unequivocally bind their future to the European Union. (EC, 2018, P. 2)

The Commission’s Western Balkans Strategy of February 2018 created new momentum across the region and greater engagement by the EU and its Member States. Still, the uptake by the countries concerned of this *historic window of opportunity* varies. (EC, 2019, p. 11)

This welcome progress achieved now calls for the Union’s concrete and fast action. The EU has the opportunity, and a strong self-interest, to lock in long-term positive momentum across the region. The Union must live up to its commitments and give credit where credit is due. Failure to reward objective progress by moving to the next stage of the European path would damage the EU’s credibility throughout the region and beyond. A tepid response to historic achievements and substantial reforms would undermine stability, seriously discourage much needed further reforms and

affect work on sensitive bilateral issues like the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.

Strategically, it would only help the EU's geopolitical competitors to root themselves on Europe's doorstep. (EC, 2019, p. 2)

The latter quotation demonstrates well how the political logic of urgency or historical opportunity has both beatific (long-term positive momentum) and horrific (damage to EU's credibility; geopolitical competitors on Europe's doorstep) aspects. It also links enlargement agenda to the wider geopolitical and geostrategic agenda, institutionalising enlargement as a key policy for tackling contemporary challenges in those sectors.

Although the tone of urgency is visible thorough the material, there is simultaneously a counter-narrative arguing that neither the Union nor the candidates are not ready yet for further enlargement. This is particularly true for the new enlargement methodology (2020a) that calls for profound reforms in the enlargement policy:

Maintaining and enhancing this (enlargement) policy is thus indispensable for the EU's credibility, for the EU' success and for the EU's influence in the region and beyond - especially at times of heightened geopolitical competition. However, it is also clear that the effectiveness of the overall accession process and of its implementation must be improved further. While the strategic direction of the policy remains more valid than ever, it must get much better traction on the ground. (EC, 2020a, p. 1)

The new methodology promises to be "forward-looking" and make the accession process more "dynamic" and "efficient". At the same time, however, it can be seen as an attempt to slow down the pace of the process as it aims to "strengthen revisability" and ensure that the reforms in candidate countries are "sustainable" by introducing sanctions for backsliding or stagnation. These simultaneous logics of urgency and the slowing down of the accession process can be also seen as a discursive double move as those detected earlier.



### 5.3 Fantasmatic logics

Fantasmatic logics in the material appeared as the beatific fantasies and horrific dystopias that the enlargement policy is legitimised with and argued for. As a general observation, fantasies and dystopias often occur together in the material as if they were two sides of the same coin. If the candidate countries converged with the EU's agenda and norms, there was a promise of fantasmatic future for the region. If "European perspective" and norms were ignored or there were signs of stagnation, dystopic images of backwardness were painted. Inspired by this finding, the two first of the three most important fantasmatic logics are here introduced as three pairs of fantasies and dystopias.

#### *Fantasmatic logic 1: progress vs. stagnation*

Perhaps the most distinguishable fantasmatic logic in the material is the juxtaposition between progress and stagnation. Progress is discursively linked to such things as modernisation, efficiency, stability, peace, digitalisation, transparency of governance, freedom of speech, professionalisation of civil servants, good neighbourly relations and economic integration. These were things that the accession process and the convergence with EU norms and rules were expected to bring to the region.

It is essential that the Western Balkans are included in the EU's efforts to embrace technological change for them to be able to benefit from digital tools, ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for their citizens. (EC, 2018, p. 14)

Predictability and conditionality will also be enhanced through greater transparency. To ensure sustainability of reforms and facilitate monitoring of implementation, all key reforms in the countries should be carried out in a fully transparent and inclusive way, with key stakeholder involvement. For its part, the European Union should endeavour to make the process more transparent, with wider publication of key documents. (EC, 2020a, p. 6)

The Western Balkans should invest more in their younger generation, our future EU citizens, and give them a perspective for the future, not the past. (EC, 2018, p. 7)

Dystopia of stagnation or backwardness, in turn, is often present when the current situation in the region is described. It is often connected to corruption, protectionism, insecurity, underdevelopment or “falling behind”, and violence among other things. The documents also use this dystopic imaginary to describe what is in store for the candidate countries if they do not follow their “European path”.

A slow pace of change in judicial culture continues throughout the Western Balkans region without sufficient commitment to the principle of judicial independence and respect for court decisions. (EC, 2020b, p. 5)

The investment climate remained largely unchanged and is characterised by weak rule of law, the lack of adequate enforcement of State aid rules, an entrenched grey economy, poor access to finance for businesses and low level of regional integration and connectivity. State interference in the economy persists. (EC, 2020b, p. 14)

The countries most advanced in the accession process *risk falling behind* on their stated ambitious goals if they do not also significantly step up efforts, in particular on fundamental reforms. (EC, 2019, p. 2)

The Western Balkans and Turkey continue to show instances of widespread corruption. Progress in successfully fighting high and medium level corruption varies across the region. While some countries, such as North Macedonia and Albania, have made progress, the track record remains unconvincing in most countries and far from meeting the requirements for membership. (EC, 2019, p. 4)

An interesting observation about the fantasy of progress is that there seems to be an implicit expectation of modernisation or progress as something technical, professional, and clinical as opposed to corrupted or political. It seems that development itself is here understood as a somewhat neutral form of expertise that the EU can provide. This fantasy is polished from any irrelevant local or bilateral political disputes and the main message is clear: development according to EU’s “perspective” is in everyone’s interest. This model development is one-directional in two senses: it comes from the EU to the region and it is expected to be linear, that is, irreversible and “sustainable”.

Managerial accountability and professionalisation of the civil service still need to be ensured in most countries and *excessive politicisation* addressed. Transparent and merit-based procedures for recruitment, promotion, demotion and dismissal need to be embedded in the legislative frameworks and consistently implemented across public services. (EC, 2020b, p. 13)

Public administration reform is essential for improving governance at all levels. This includes the quality and accountability of the administration, professionalisation of the civil service and *de-politicisation*, sound public financial management, and ensuring quality services to citizens and businesses. (EC, 2020b, p. 6)

Interestingly, also the areas of development in the enlargement policy itself are understood in quite technical terms. This is visible f.ex in how the aims of the new methodology are described:

[E]ffectiveness of the accession process and its implementation must be improved further. While the strategic direction of the policy remains more valid than ever, it must get much better traction on the ground -- process needs to be better equipped to deal with structural weaknesses in the countries. (EC, 2020a, p. 1)

The tendency to use technical language is perhaps a way to reduce feelings of uncertainty and lack of control over the process. It can also be part of a more general understanding of “political” as something messy or unprofessional. On the other hand, it would be wrong to describe the fantasy discourse of progress by the EU as *apolitical* neither explicitly nor implicitly. As discussed earlier in the context of social logic of the EU as a choice, there is an assumption according to which accession is an “active societal choice -- to reach and respect the highest European standards and values” (EC, 2020a, p. 3). In fact, the new methodology states also that “it is time to put the political nature of the process front and centre” (ibid.) and that “the commitment of the Member States to share a common future with the Western Balkans as full members of the Union is a significant *political and not simply technical* undertaking” (ibid., emphasis added). These simultaneous narratives of enlargement as a technical undertaking and as a fundamental political choice begs the question of what is meant by “political” in this context. Looking at how the “political” is framed in the documents, it seems that “political nature of the process” is instrumentalised and used to refer to the diverse ways in which the accession process should be

advanced through different channels. On the other hand, political is used to describe the accession process as an opposite to “autopilot” or “technical undertaking” (ibid.), that is, a deeper societal choice of principles. In other words, “political nature” of enlargement is not used to construct the enlargement process as political in the sense that its substance, principles or institutionalisation could be questioned.

If the EU is the one that is expected to fulfill the fantasy of progress in the Western Balkans region, there is a horrific counter dystopia of “third countries” and their influence. This refers to Russia, China and other actors that have interests and agency in the region and are seen as threats or competitors. The horrific third-party discourse is clearly a rising trend; in 2018 its not mentioned at all, 2019 only once and in the 2020 enlargement methodology and communication already multiple times.

Increasing business and investment activity by third countries in the Western Balkans frequently neglects socio-economic and financial sustainability and EU rules on public procurement, and may result in high levels of indebtedness, exclusion from the market of EU companies unable to compete, sub-optimal use of public resources and transfer of control over strategic assets and resources. (EC, 2020b, p. 15)

Serbia continued to develop intense relations and strategic partnerships with a number of countries worldwide, including Russia, China and the US. Serbia’s cooperation with China increased during the COVID-19 crisis and was marked by pro-China and EU sceptical rhetoric by high-ranking officials. (ibid., p. 16)

EU companies are the biggest investors in the region, providing 73% of foreign direct investment. They are thus the main external driver of growth and jobs in the region. It is key to strengthen the resilience of the region to ensure the full adherence of any foreign-funded economic activity to EU values, norms and standards, notably in key areas such as the rule of law, public procurement, environment, energy, infrastructure and competition. (ibid., p. 15)

The way in which the “third-party influence” is described seems to suggest that the competition on influence in the Western Balkans region is seen here as a zero-sum game, where any non-European influence is a threat to EU’s standing in the region. Here, again, the EU’s unmatched

commitment and contribution in the region is highlighted in order to construct EU-WB6 cooperation as the fantasmatic option for the region.

It is critical to raise awareness in the region of the opportunities closer integration and reforms entail, and to tackle *malign third country influence*. (EC, 2020a, p. 2, emphasis added)

China's business and investment activity in the Western Balkans has been on the rise and can in principle offer opportunities for the region; however, these investments very frequently neglect socio-economic and financial sustainability and EU rules on public procurement, and may result in high levels of indebtedness and transfer of control over strategic assets and resources. This means that the partner countries should fully implement the letter and spirit of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the EU and prioritise reforms in the relevant negotiation chapters of the accession process .(EC, 2019, p 8)

Finally, the fantasmatic logic of progress is completed with the fantasy of fulfillment or “closure”, that is, closing of the accession negotiations and becoming a Member State:

Closing negotiations: Once all closing benchmarks for all chapters have been met, including a credible and sustainable track record of reform implementation, notably on the rule of law, Member States would be in a position to agree to closing overall negotiations in an inter- governmental conference. This would require continued, irreversible progress on the reform agenda.-- Signature of the Accession Treaty: Once the country or countries have concluded negotiations, the Accession Treaty can be signed, after the opinion of the Commission, the consent of the European Parliament and the decision of the Council on the admission of the new Member States. -- Accession: Once the ratification of the Accession Treaty in all EU Member States and the acceding country or countries is completed, taking into the account the respective national constitutional requirements, accession could then take place. (EC, 2018, p. 8)

Looking at how this end goal is described, it is interesting how it is at the same time constructed as a clear, logical and technical process as well as something that is so many steps away.

## *Fantasmatic logic 2: credible vs. fragmented EU*

Another fantasmatic logic that was clearly detectable from the material was the fantasy of the EU as a unified actor, one that “speaks with one voice”. As discussed earlier, this unity is seen as a condition for the EU to be a credible actor in the global arena. The EU’s ability to “export peace” and peacefully transform societies is the central idea and legitimation of the EU’s expansion, in addition to economic integration. On the other hand, ideal of unity is also very much about EU’s internal affairs: the premise for the EU’s ability to function is that its “united in diversity”. The fear of polarisation and fragmentation is present in the documents. Both bilateral disputes and internal polarisation of the countries are seen as the dystopic counterpart of the fantasy of unified EU. This dystopia is projected to both the current Member States and the Western Balkan countries.

A stronger national consensus on the overriding priority of EU integration, overcoming the current polarisation and demonstrating political will across party divides, is also necessary to sustain and consolidate the progress made by the country (EC, 2019, P. 16)

Special arrangements and irrevocable commitments must also be put in place to ensure that new Member States are not in a position to block the accession of other Western Balkan candidates. (EC, 2018, p. 16)

These fears and scepticism towards nationalism are quite expected, if one keeps in mind the Commission’s role to represent the interests of the whole Union vis- à-vis the member states. It could be even interpreted that the Commission uses the dystopia of fragmented EU to put the Member States in their place:

All parties must abstain from misusing outstanding issues in the EU accession process. In the same vein, Member States and institutions must speak with one voice in the region, sending clear signals of support and encouragement, and speaking clearly and honestly on shortcomings when they occur. (EC, 2020a, p. 2)

The EU’s founding myth of “overcoming history” and violent nationalism as a European fantasy—or as an initiation ritual—is also visible:

All countries must unequivocally commit, in both word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past, by achieving reconciliation and solving open issues well before their accession to the EU, in particular border dispute. (EC, 2018, p. 17)

The EU's enlargement policy must continue to *export stability*. Therefore the EU cannot and will not import bilateral disputes. They must be solved as a matter of urgency by the responsible parties. Achieving this goal will be facilitated by an atmosphere of good neighbourly relations, but will also be a litmus test for how sound these relations really are. (EC, 2018, p. 7)

Overcoming the legacy of the past and addressing disputes arising from the conflicts of the 1990s remain key. Important outstanding bilateral issues still have to be solved—There is no place in the EU for inflammatory rhetoric or the glorification of war criminals, from any side. (ibid., p. 7)

Western Balkans leaders must also show further efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations to bring stability and prosperity to their citizens, while giving confidence to the EU that the region is *addressing the legacy of its past*. (EC, 2020a, p. 2, emphasis added)

These quotes demonstrate how the EU is here understood as a fantasmatic post-conflict space, one where the Western Balkan countries can only enter once they have “moved on” and resolved their disputes. The role of the EU is to support and oversee the peace processes from the outside as an expert by experience:

The Commission will further extend support to reconciliation initiatives, including those that address transitional justice and seek to overcome the legacy of recent conflict. There will be a continuation of support for the work of Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. The Commission will also explore how best to further the work of International Committee for the Red Cross and the International Commission on Missing Persons in fostering regional cooperation to resolve the issue of missing persons. (EC, 2018, p. 15)

### *Fantasmatic logic 3: economic and regional integration*

A third important fantasmatic logic is the fantasy of regional cooperation and economic integration. The Western Balkans is seen as having significant “untapped” economic potential that can be materialised through regional integration and transformation into EU-compatible market economies.

This policy approach will thus be the cornerstone of a forward-looking agenda. This agenda will support the transformation of the Western Balkans into functioning market economies able to integrate fully into the EU’s single market, to create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, to improve the business and investment climate, to promote the rule of law and to stop the brain drain from the region. (EC, 2020a, p. 2)

Regional integration is a key factor for raising living standards in the Western Balkans. The creation of a Regional Economic Area (REA) brings more competition and allows economies of scale and productivity gains. A regional market will unleash intra-regional trade and would make the Western Balkans a more attractive investment destination. Market integration based on EU rules and standards will help create opportunities for developing new value chains and increasing the attractiveness of the region for foreign direct investments, including from the EU. (EC, 2019, p. 7)

The fantasy of economic integration and regional cooperation is hardly surprising: after all it is the other dominant narrative of European integration in addition to the EU as a peace process. Interestingly, however, there seems to be a logic according to which there must be at least some level of intra-(sub)regional integration prior to joining the EU’s internal markets. This can be seen in part as the EU’s attempt to make the candidate countries bear the responsibility or “take ownership” of economic integration. This is compatible with the idea of economic integration and local peace process as intertwined.

Generally, regional cooperation cannot be imposed from outside but must be driven more actively by the countries of the region, which needs to take full ownership of efforts contributing to stability, reconciliation and increased economic opportunities.



--Regional cooperation should be enhanced especially on war crimes, including through reconciliation initiatives, such as the establishment of a regional truth commission. (EC, 2019, p. 9)

However, the documents stress the EU's contribution and role in the economic transformation of the region. The message seems to be that the responsibility of integration is in the hands of the candidate countries, but the integration and transformation should be done according to EU's norms and model, as this is the only viable direction for achieving the fantasy of prosperity:

The EU remains the main external driver of growth and jobs in the Western Balkans. The full adherence of any foreign economic activity to EU values, norms and standards is key for the region's success (EC, 2019, p. 11)

EU companies are the biggest investors in the region, providing 73% of foreign direct investment. They are thus the main external driver of growth and jobs in the region. It is key to strengthen the resilience of the region to ensure the full adherence of any foreign-funded economic activity to EU values, norms and standards, notably in key areas such as the rule of law, public procurement, environment, energy, infrastructure and competition (EC, 2020b, p. 15)

Although the fantasy of economic cooperation is primarily marketed as beneficial to the candidate countries themselves, the interests of the EU and its Member countries are also transmitted in the documents. The Western Balkans region is seen as a lucrative market and perhaps a source of cheap labor force. Thus, the "untapped" potential is as much for the EU itself than for the region.

The Western Balkans have important untapped economic potential and significant scope for increased intra-regional economic cooperation and trade. With a population of nearly 18 million people, *the region is an important market for EU goods* (EC, 2020b, p. 14, emphasis added)

The fantasmatic logic of connectivity is linked to the fantasy of regional integration. Increasing connectivity is seen as a concrete way to link the Western Balkans region to the "European space" and to "increase the competitiveness of the continent as a whole" (EC, 2018, p. 14):

Enhancing connectivity within the Western Balkans represents *a strategic interest for both sides*. Increasing transport and energy connections will allow for increased competitiveness, economic growth and security of supply, and is at the same time an important prerequisite for economic integration within the Western Balkans. -- The Western Balkans are surrounded geographically by EU Member States and it is a political priority to connect infrastructure also between the EU and the Western Balkans and to accelerate the development of interconnected trans-European networks in the fields of transport, energy and digital services. (EC, 2018, p. 13)

Enhanced connectivity in transport and energy will accelerate the integration of the region into pan European networks, while strengthening competitive energy markets and developing economic corridors over the region. The Transport Community Treaty, which has now been ratified by all parties, will support and strengthen the implementation of the connectivity agenda. The creation of a digital space and of more integrated labour markets also offer new possibilities for youth in the region. (EC, 2019, pp. 7-8)

Connectivity, in turn, is linked to another central aspect of the fantasy of economic integration, that of interdependency. Interestingly, interdependency within the Western Balkans and between the EU and the region seems to be both fantasmatic and dystopic. On the one hand, interdependency is part of the “virtuous circle” of enlargement and an incentive for peaceful cooperation:

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the high level of market integration and the inter-dependence between the EU and the Western Balkans economies, as well as amongst the latter themselves. The Western Balkans region is engaged in a process of regulatory convergence with the EU. This alignment will allow the deepening of the Regional Economic Area (REA), turning it into a common regional market based on EU rules and standards. Both developments reinforce each other and make the region an attractive investment area. (EC, 2020b, p. 14)

On the other hand, it seems that the EU also considers the interdependence between the region and the EU as a potential threat that increases the EU's vulnerability. This is visible especially in discussing migration and organised crime, where enlargement is securitised, that is, constructed as a matter of security:

At the same time it is essential to further step up strategic and operational cooperation with the Western Balkans on migration and border management. This includes ensuring access to international protection, sharing of relevant information (such as risk analyses), enhancing border control, ensuring the effective implementation of readmission and return policies and the fight against irregular migration and migrant smuggling. Strengthening international and regional cooperation (including with EU agencies and the respective liaison officers in the region), and further consolidating border and migration management capacities is also necessary (EC, 2018, p. 11)

The recently proposed New European Pact on Migration and Asylum stresses that in comprehensive partnerships, migration should be built in as a core issue, based on an assessment of the interests of the EU and its partner countries. The Western Balkans require a tailor-made approach, both due to their geographical location and to their future as an integral part of the EU: coordination can help to ensure they are well equipped as future Member States to respond constructively to shared challenges, developing their capacities and border procedures to bring them closer to the EU given their enlargement perspective (EC, 2020b, p. 9)

The counter-dystopia to the fantasy of economic transformation and integration is that of protectionism, backwardness, unemployment, brain drain and lack of investments. This is used to describe the current situation in the region as well as to point out how horrific the region's future will be without European integration:

Economic development and increasing employment is essential also to stem the demographic challenges of the Western Balkans, with high emigration and low birth rates. Without stronger economies and democratic governance generally, these

phenomena will continue, with the associated risks of widespread disenchantment, especially among the youth, and brain drain. (EC, 2019, p. 8)

## 6. Discussion

While the previous chapter introduced the findings of the analysis, this chapter focuses on discussing the implications of these findings. This is done by reflecting and comparing how the analysis relates to earlier literature and the theoretical framework. The main relevance of this analysis was to bring the post-colonial concepts into the context of EU enlargement documents through post-structural analysis to understand better the EU as a postcolonial actor. This analysis also brought insight into how (post)colonialist discourses appear in practice, producing a certain—yet in many parts contradictory—understanding of the enlargement process, its agents, goals and future. For many parts, the findings supported and complemented the earlier critical literature on postcolonialism, European identity and European integration that was introduced earlier. In what follows, I have divided the discussion points thematically into three parts. The limitations and shortcomings of the analysis are also discussed.

### 6.1 The EU as a soft empire

The analysis showed that both “traditional” or essentialist as well as more nuanced or ambiguous forms of colonial discourse could be found in the EU enlargement discourse. Starting from the former and looking at the material through Edward Said’s ideas of knowledge production, it becomes evident that enlargement policy cannot escape its postcolonial setting. According to Said, knowledge is always produced in a political context and for a political purpose. The documents are written with an assumption that they produce knowledge about the enlargement process and the “situation” in candidate countries in relation to EU’s standards and norms. This setting already presumes a certain imbalance and (post)colonial mindsets. As argued by Said in the context of Orientalism (1995/1978), postcolonialism in enlargement can be also seen as “a distribution of geopolitical awareness” or “a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world” in this case the Western Balkans (p. 12) While the postcolonial position cannot be escaped, it can be *recognized*. There is no trace of such reflection in the EU enlargement policy papers. On the contrary, the materials normalise the enlargement as a one-directional “civilising mission”, where the roles of donors and receivers are strictly casted and there is a clear hierarchy of knowledge and value systems. The fantasmatic logic of progress is a good example of this: the

convergence with the EU norms is equalised with progress and prosperity, whereas failing to conduct reforms à la EU means that the Western Balkans are confined to their dystopic present: stagnation, corruption, instability and insecurity.

Traditional colonial narrative is also present in how the EU itself is constructed as a unified, benevolent actor that promotes its superior values in the global arena and its neighborhood against “malign third-country influence”. Here, the ideology of the EU is perhaps most explicit and outspoken. The two fantasmatic pillars of European identity by Christofer Kølvrå (2016, 2018) are visible, that is, the expectations that European is superior and that everyone wants to be European (see Ch. 2 in this thesis). This attitude is crystallised in phrases such as “Ultimately, citizens yearn to live in countries that are prosperous and equal, where the rule of law is strong and corruption is rooted out.” (EC, 2018, p. 2). There seems to be a sincere belief in the EU’s power to transform the countries for the better and that “European experience must stand as the normal line of development” (Kaiwar, 2014, p. 27). The EU’s role is to “export stability” to the Balkans and not to “import bilateral issues” (EC, 2018, p. 7) from the region, where conflicts are somehow confined. This is visible in the material in how the solutions and development models by the EU are framed as the only option that could provide the region with the fantasmatic future of progress, modernisation and democracy. The idea resonates with Ian Manner’s understanding of the EU as a normative power that is built on common values and promotes its values in the global arena, aiming to build a “new normal” in international relations (Manners 2002; 2011). On the other hand, the expectation of superiority can be seen as the fantasmatic fuel and the legitimisation for pursuing geopolitical interests and fighting “third country influence” in the Western Balkans region. This supports the claim of the critics of the Mannersian normative power approach, who argue that the discourse of the EU as a normative power disguises its “imperialist/neo-colonial pretensions” (Petrovic & Tzifakis, 2021). Based on my own analysis, both intentions are present in the enlargement policy documents. This finding supports the notion of the EU enlargement as an example of EU’s “stability-democracy dilemma”, continuous balancing between stabilising the region and supporting democratic values (Smith et al. 2019).

The findings of the analysis are also compatible with Jan Zielonka’s theory of the EU as a modern type of empire that needs both internal and external legitimisation to survive (Zielonka, 2013). The social logic of the virtuous circle of enlargement is perhaps the clearest example of this:

enlargement politics is supposed to benefit everyone. This logic of virtuous circle can be seen as an example of Joseph Nye's (2002) soft power, whereby countries are not forced but persuaded to obey. In reality, the enlargement politics seems to be more about soft imperialism or "soft power applied in a hard way" (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2005), since the candidate countries are not given any choice but to obey if they wish to avoid a dystopic future. In this sense, the enlargement discourse is a discourse of necessity that by leaving no valid alternatives attempts to fix itself as hegemonic and cover over the contingency of social reality. In this discourse, the candidate countries are not included in negotiations about their own future but their agency is in the implementation of the EU *acquis*. From this perspective, the definition of soft imperialism by Hettne & Söderbaum (2005) sounds very accurate: it is "an asymmetric form of dialogue or even the imposition or strategic use of norms and conditionalities enforced for reasons of self-interest rather than for the creation of a genuine (interregional) dialogue" (p. 5).

The documents go into detail in arguing for the enlargement agenda. This is of course typical in any decision-making process that seeks legitimation: the relevance of policies has to be explained. But the persuasive style of the documents also suggests that there is demand for explanations and convincing. Although the need to carry on with the enlargement agenda is presented as an existential necessity for the Union, the need to prove it might be a sign that not everyone agrees with it. This way, enlargement policy documents can be seen as defending the enlargement agenda in the more general discussion of European integration, where the need for further enlargement is questioned. This defensive becomes more understandable, if we consider the recent developments in the enlargement politics: besides the continuous enlargement fatigue, the enlargement agenda has recently become more and more contested (Bélanger & Schimmelfennig, 2021) and resisted (Economides, 2020).

## 6.2 Blurred lines

In addition to more recognizable and traditional post-colonialist and imperial mentalities, the analysis also supported the notion that more particular and nuanced concepts and theories are needed to understand different forms of postcolonialism in EU's enlargement politics towards the Western Balkans. This is where the critique of Balkanism and the more recent interpretations of

Europe and its Others proved to be fruitful. In the material, the Western Balkans is not seen as the absolute Other but rather as a “lesser” Europe that exists in relation to the “real” Europe. As pointed out by Merje Kuus (2004), the Western Balkans is “not simply backward, but a learner, an experiment and a testing ground” (p. 474). Indeed, many parts of the material represented a more ambiguous understanding of the border between Europe and non-Europe.

The most interesting discovery in this regard was the material’s contradictory style that caused ambiguity. This is what I have called the discursive double move. In the empirical material, contradiction appeared in many forms. Perhaps the most distinguishable of these was the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion as a political logic. As discussed in the analysis, placing the Western Balkans both inside and outside Europe, constructing the region as homogenic and diverse, interdependent and independent, blurred the lines between Europe and non-Europe. In contrast to essentialist dichotomies, this finding reminds of Homi Bhabha’s (1995) concept of hybrid space, where the ambivalence of colonialist discourse stems from coloniser’s paradoxical relation to the colonized. Furthermore, the finding resonates well with the idea of multilayered Europe that was developed in the works of Merje Kuus (2007) and Ole Wæver (2001). Indeed, this analysis supports their argument that the division between Europe and non-Europe is constructed as a continuum or a paradox rather than a dichotomy. Borrowing Rainer Hülse’s concept, the enlargement process appeared in this material dominantly through a path metaphor: in the documents, candidate countries were neither completely out or in, but somewhere *on their way* to Europe. The idea of multilayered Europe also resonates with the political logics of agency and the social logics of the EU as a choice, for it highlights the agency and responsibility of the candidate countries in choosing the right path and fulfilling their European perspective.

However, finding contradictions and ambiguity from the material does not mean that they are consciously produced. From this perspective, the double move can be interpreted as a consequence of an attempt to compromise between diverse opinions. Still, the question of intentionality does not take away the effect of the double move, which contributes to ambiguity on where the Western Balkan countries stand in relation to the EU. This confusion is certainly felt in candidate countries where the uncertainty and continuous delays have been decreasing the credibility of the European project (Latal, 2020). As this criticism has not been very effective in changing the Commission’s tone, it begs the question of whether some actors within the EU do



not see the stagnation and uncertainty as problematic. Indeed, as long as the Western Balkan countries are committed to their “European path”, the region can work as buffer zone for the EU that keeps the aspiring candidates on hold. Based on the documents, the EU does not always consider that this is necessarily so bad for the candidate countries: it is many times highlighted how the process itself already benefits the candidates. Although the die-hard pro-EU actors in the region are not happy to be left in a waiting room, leaders of the region can benefit from such in-betweenness. As argued by Katalin Miklóssy and Hanna Smith (2019), in-betweenness can open new room for maneuvering for the leaders who can make different partners to compete for loyalty and influence. Serbia, for example, has used its position to practice “multi-vector foreign policy” by balancing between the EU, Russia and China. (Ponomareva, 2020). From this perspective, it is not so clear that the ambiguity only works to construct and renew the power imbalance between the EU and the Western Balkans region. As proposed by Homi Bhabha, the ambiguity and instability of colonial discourse reveals its contingency and opens space for counter-hegemonic narratives (Prasad, 2004, p. 21).

Indeed, recent years have proved that the appeal of the EU might not be as strong and dominant as the EU has believed. The realisation of real competition of “the hearts and minds” in the region is visible in the material. The social logic of the EU as a choice demands for firmer commitment to the accession process by the candidate countries. It can also be understood as a counter-act to recent feelings of ambiguity in enlargement and to the multi-vectoral policies that it has enabled. Perhaps the fear of third-country influence is also one reason why there is no sign of any intermediate solution besides being a full member, some kind of “membership light”. This is of course connected to a wider debate on European Integration and the potential different forms of multi-speed integration. Fear of losing the Western Balkans is visible i.e. in the following quotation already cited in analysis:

There can be no ambiguity by leaders about where the Western Balkans belong and the direction in which they are heading. This is necessary to secure and sustain the support of their own and of EU citizens, and must be reflected in leaders’ communications and outreach to citizens. (EC, 2018, p. 3)

The volatile loyalties have clearly become a threat to EU's interests, to the credibility of the enlargement process and to the EU itself. Combined with the perceived threat of geopolitical competition, it could be argued that the EU has ended up damaging its own interests by producing ambiguity regarding Western Balkan's standing in relation to the EU. This points out one paradox of colonialism developed by Bhabha (1995): while the non-west (the Balkans) is seen as weak and incompetent, it is also identified as a threat capable of challenging the whole "credibility" of the EU. The sanction mechanism embedded in the new enlargement methodology can be seen as a response to this realization, as it sanctions the candidate countries for stagnation. It can be also seen as a response to the EU's internal developments and the increasing polarisation between different interpretations of Europeanness. In the material, the fantasmatic logics of united EU vs polarised EU clearly reflects these fears.

### 6.3 Dislocation

As discussed in Chapter 3.2.2, the ideological nature of discourse can be analysed by looking at how moments of dislocation are reacted to. This draws attention to whether the contingent and open nature of social reality is recognised or whether it is only the substance that is contested. The introduction of new enlargement methodology (EC, 2020a) clearly represented a potential moment of dislocation, as its purpose was to contest the way in which enlargement politics is done. Based on this analysis, it can be argued that the response for this potential dislocation is ideological rather than ethical, since contestation is only directed to the substance and technicalities of the policies, not the assumptions that they were built upon. This is evident for example in how the "political nature of the [enlargement] process" is understood in the new enlargement methodology, as discussed in Chapter 5.3 (pp. 74-75).

It could be even said that the policies are presented in a way that excludes the possibility of ethical response, that is, a deeper contestation and reflection of the normative framework of enlargement politics. Thus, it can be argued that it works in covering over the radical contingency and the new possibilities for identification it could open. In practice, this could mean for example re-thinking the institutionalised imbalances between the EU and the candidate countries in the accession process. This way, the lack of ethical response contributes to sustaining and normalising the different colonialist discourses in enlargement policy. This observation stresses the

importance of approaching enlargement politics from a critical perspective as a practice in a (post)colonial space.

#### 6.4 Limitations

While this analysis brought interesting insight to the research topic, it also had its limitations in responding to the research question. First, as this analysis had a theoretical starting point, it naturally directed me to look for confirmation for the theoretical framework. In this way, the analysis is never fully “open” and cannot provide objective information or answer to the research question, as discussed in the chapter 4.1 about epistemology. While this does not make the research any less relevant, it should be kept in mind while estimating the findings.

As for the method, it is challenging to estimate whether the division into three logics provided any analytical value. While the three logics and the aiding concepts worked as useful clues in analysing the empirical material, the attempt to identify them sometimes felt counter intuitive to the research task. In looking for the different logics from the material, it was also challenging to set the focus and level of analysis: whether to concentrate on individual phrases and choices of words, more structural elements, or the context of the material. The result of this uncertainty is visible in the analysis as a lack of strict focus. As the logics approach only represents one way of doing post-structuralist discourse analysis, some other approach would have certainly directed attention to different aspects of the material.

The empirical material also set some limitations. First, the scope of this thesis limited the number of documents that was possible to include in this analysis. This limits the analysis to only recent developments in enlargement politics and prevents me from the kind of credibility and that longitudinal analysis of a longer period could provide. Working with a small set of data, individual observations can get disproportionate importance. More material might have provided me with a better understanding on how specific these findings are for this particular time period. The material is also limited in what it can tell about the social reality of enlargement politics and the diversity of different opinions that form the policies. Focusing solely on Commission’s enlargement policy documents, there is no way to tell a) what do these documents represent and b) what are their implications for enlargement politics as a practice, whether they are these just

ceremonial declarations. A more diverse set of data combined with i.e., interviews from people who work with enlargement politics could help in putting these documents into context and to see if the findings are specific for this type of material. To get a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, it would have also been interesting to investigate the different national narratives on enlargement which surely influence EU's enlargement policy through European Council.

## 7. Conclusions: fifty shades of postcolonialism

This thesis has aimed to answer the question: (how) is EU's enlargement policy postcolonial? The research question stemmed from an urge to understand the normative background of enlargement politics. Based on earlier literature, enlargement was framed as a policy process in the intersection between the EU's internal and external issues. Recent studies showed how enlargement is—amongst other things—about transforming the EU's self-other relations. As this thesis argues that these relations cannot be understood independently of the colonial roots of the European project, different postcolonial theories provided a useful toolkit to critically assess the enlargement discourse. Building on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1995/1978), this thesis understood (post)colonialism as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (p. 9). Thus, colonialism is produced in the interplay between the material and the discursive. To understand the ways in which colonialism might be visible in enlargement politics, this thesis used post-structuralist discourse theory (PDT) and the logics approach in particular to study the different assumptions embedded in enlargement discourse.

The analysis showed that there are many elements, discourses and assumptions that reflect different (post)colonial mentalities and power relations. It also demonstrated the diversity of the forms in which colonialism can play out in practice. Instead of one, consistent and omnipresent colonialism, this thesis suggests that it is more fruitful to talk about colonialisms in plural.

Although colonialism manifests itself in different ways, these manifestations share a Wittgensteinian family resemblance, (post)colonial logics that can be recognized thanks to the variety of existing post-colonialist theories and concepts. Enlargement and the EU's relation to the Western Balkans emerged from the material as somewhat paradoxical, preliminary supporting Homi Bhabha's notion of the ambivalence in colonial discourse. Based on these findings, further research could investigate the applicability of Bhabha's concepts in EU's relation to its Others.

Finally, the analysis showed how colonialism is not about individual “colonialist” elements or actions but rather an institutionalised way of doing things that normalizes power imbalance between the EU and the Western Balkans. Enlargement policy produces Europeanness as something that can be evaluated against certain institutionalized norms. In the accession process, Western Balkan countries are positioned within this framework, reducing complex societies into

something that can be managed, evaluated, governed and educated (Said, 1993, p. 41). However, this is not to say that enlargement is an evil colonialist plot, but rather to underline that colonialist assumptions are a sedimented part of how the world is seen in EU's enlargement policy. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention and question these ways in which (post)colonialisms influence to the EU's institutionalised understandings of normal, problematic, or desirable.

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